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A

GONDREVILLE MYSTERY

(UNE TÉNÉBREUSE AFFAIRE. UN EPISODE SOUS LA TERREUR)

Translated by

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with a Preface by

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LONDON

J. M. DENT AND CO.

NEW YORK: THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

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Norwood Press
J. S. Cushing & Co.—Berwick & Smith
Norwood Mass. U.S.A.

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Drawn and Etched by W. Boucher

PREFACE

WHILE I was engaged in preparing these Introductions, I saw in an English newspaper, of some literary as well as other repute, remarks on Balzac as compared with some writers of crime and detective stories in the present day. According to a habit which alternates with the other habit of reverencing predecessors exaggeratedly, the reviewer spoke with the utmost contempt of Balzac's work, and opined that contemporary English practitioners of the art had made progress in it, justifying something like John P. Robinson's contempt for the persons 'down in Judee.' It is fair to say that what these remarks were immediately based upon was not *Une Ténébreuse Affaire*, but *Ferragus*, which is a much cruder specimen of the author's power. But, still, I am inclined to think that this generous, and probably young, partisan of the present was a little hard on the poor old past. In the first place, it is something to be the original and not the copy; and it is certain as anything in history that Balzac begat Poe, and that Poe begat all our English crime-novelists. To raise the flower when the seed can be bought at any shop round the corner is, as Lord Tennyson once remarked, not an extraordinarily difficult affair; to which it may be added that to raise ever bigger and brighter-coloured flowers by ingenious crossing

and some pains is also not beyond the reach of tolerably limited powers. It is very different to make the first cross, to fish the murex up, if I may shift the comparison and the quotation.

Perhaps, too, it is a little hasty to make so sure that things have actually improved. I speak on this point with diffidence, having no very special love for any of these detective stories as such. But I think you may be too ingenious and recondite in a detective story as well as elsewhere, and that the picture is not always the best where the painter has taken the most elaborate pains.

However this may be, he must, I think, be a difficult person to please who is not pleased with *Une Ténébreuse Affaire*, the only blot on which seems to me to be the early conduct of Michu, which was rather calculated to attract than to avert suspicion. Otherwise the games and counter-games in which Corentin figures justify that personage's reputation much better than *Les Chouans* (where his part is practically played for him by others), and rank with the most ingenious exercises of the kind. In this story, moreover, while he had attained greater technical skill than in *Les Chouans*, Balzac still retained enough of his old romantic enthusiasm to insert a strong element of nobility and pathos into the story, by means of the devotion of Michu and the heroism of Laurence. His admixture of reasons of state may be regarded with different feelings by different persons, and Marsay's key to the whole business may or may not seem superfluous. But it must be remembered that in Balzac's time the opinion which Miss Martha Buskbody so uncompromisingly expressed

at the end of *Old Mortality*—the opinion that the author ought to account for everything and mention, at least summarily, the ultimate fate of everybody—was still very largely held by readers, and not discountenanced by critics. Moreover, the practice gave Balzac an opportunity of keying the story on to that fantastic society of wits, statesmen, dandies, and great ladies which he so fondly cherished, and which had such an influence on his time, that, as Sainte-Beuve, no friendly witness, tells us, a Venetian coterie actually adopted it as a model, and played out the parts of the Marsays and the Maufrigneuses with all gravity in real life.

We may, however, leave the wiles of Corentin and Peyrade, the evidence of the crusts and the bottle-wax, the extremely ingenious confusion between the two imprisonments and the rest of the cat-and-mouse business, to those who appreciate it, with nothing more than a repetition of the remark that Balzac, if not the absolute inventor (for nobody ever is the absolute inventor of anything), was the first really great novelist to devote himself to matter of this kind. There will always be a sufficiency of good wits to hold that he has not been surpassed, to say no more, by any other novelist, great or small, since, especially in the little fishing or feeling passage-of-arms between Corentin and the curé. And we may leave to other tastes the romantic interest of the actual story. It is well balanced and completed by the short but very powerful and very touching 'Episode sous la Terreur.' This is one of those good things which Balzac was fortunately content to leave in a scale of treatment where their full beauty came out, without extending or connecting them,

as he too often did with others, so as sometimes to weaken, if not to destroy, their effect. It is, in fact, one of what I have elsewhere called his 'anecdotes'—things, the best of which, to the number of a dozen or so, are excelled by nothing of their kind in the whole range of French fiction, save, perhaps, by one or two of Mérimée's. But to some readers it may add to the interest of a story, which in itself is so consummate and so compressed as to need no critical comment, to know that Balzac wrote a very large portion (now reprinted in his miscellaneous works) of the so-called *Mémoires de Sanson*, and had thus an intimate acquaintance with executioners, as well as a natural attraction to the sinister and terrible side of their calling.

Une Ténébreuse Affaire appeared with chapter divisions in the newspaper *Le Commerce* during January and February 1841, and was published by Souverain as a book in 1843. It was placed in the *Comédie* three years later.

G. S.

A GONDREVILLE MYSTERY

To Monsieur de Margone, from his grateful guest at Château de Saché, de Balzac

I

THE TRIALS OF THE POLICE

THE autumn of the year 1803 was one of the finest during the Empire Period, as we call the earliest years of the nineteenth century. Rain had fallen in October; the fields were refreshed; and the green leaves were still on the trees in mid-November. Wherefore people were beginning to believe in a covenant between heaven and Bonaparte, then recently declared Consul for life. This belief was one among many to which he owed his magical influence; and (strange coincidence!) when the sun failed him in 1812, his prosperity came to an end.

Towards four o'clock in the afternoon on the fifteenth of November, 1803, the sunlight fell like a crimson dust over the crests of two double rows of ancient elms in a long and lordly avenue — and lighted up the sand and the bents of grass about one of those vast circular spaces which you may see near country seats; for land in former times was worth so little that it could be sacrificed to ornament. The air was so pure, the evening so mild, that the family from the lodge were sitting out of doors as if it were summer-time. A man in a green canvas shooting-coat with green buttons, breeches

of the same material, linen gaiters reaching to the knees, and thin-soled walking-shoes, was busy cleaning a rifle with that punctilious care which a skilled sportsman bestows on his weapon in leisure moments. This man, however, had neither pouch nor game-bag, nor any of a sportsman's accoutrements, and an ill-disguised dread seemed to weigh upon the minds of the two women who sat watching him. Indeed, if any one else had been looking on at this scene from behind one of the bushes, he must have shuddered with the man's wife and the old mother-in-law. Clearly, no sportsman takes such minute pains for a day's shooting; nor, in the department of Aube, does he carry a heavy rifle.

'Are you going buck-shooting, Michu?' asked his pretty young wife, forcing a smile.

Michu did not answer her at once. He turned his attention to the dog that was lying out in the sunshine with his muzzle on his outstretched paws, in the charming attitude peculiar to sporting dogs. This animal had raised his head and was snuffing the wind, first in the direction of the avenue that stretched away for more than half a mile, and then again towards a cross-road which came out to the left of the great circle.

'No,' said Michu, at length. 'It is a monster that I do not mean to miss; it is a lynx.'

The dog, a very handsome brown and white spaniel, began to growl.

'Good,' muttered Michu. 'Spies! The country swarms with them.'

Madame Michu, a beautiful fair-haired, blue-eyed woman, with a grave, thoughtful face and a form moulded like an antique statue, raised her eyes sorrowfully to the sky. Some dark and bitter trouble seemed to weigh upon her. The man's looks to some extent justified the woman's fears. The laws of physiognomy are exact not merely in their application to character, but also in forecasting the

future. Some faces are prophetic. If it were possible to obtain faithful portraits of all who die upon the scaffold (and these statistics from the life are of importance to society), the science of Gall and Lavater would prove incontestably that there were strange tokens on all of those faces, even among the guiltless. Yes, Fate sets a mark on the countenances of those that are destined to die a violent death; and that seal was visible for experienced eyes on the expressive face of the man with the rifle.

Michu was short and stout; and jerky and nimble in his movements as a monkey. He was a man of quiet temper, but his countenance of the squat Kalmuck type, his white skin streaked with tiny distended blood vessels, and red crisp hair, gave him a sinister look. His eyes were like a tiger's, tawny and clear; you might gaze down into their uttermost depths, they neither kindled nor moved. Steady, bright, unblenching, they grew intolerable at last. The continual contrast between the man's quick alertness and the unchanging eyes added to the glacial impression which Michu made upon you at first sight. Here was a man prompt to act, a man whose whole power of action was controlled by one fixed idea; even as in animals the creature's life is entirely subordinated to unreflecting instinct.

Since 1793 Michu had worn a fan-shaped beard, a peculiarity which would have lent a formidable look to his face even if he had not been the president of a Jacobin club during the Terror. The flat-nosed Socratic visage was crowned by a noble forehead, so curved, however, that it seemed to overhang the face beneath it; the well-set ears seemed ready to move like the ears of a wild animal and always on the alert. The mouth was always open (a habit common enough among countrymen), so that you could catch a glimpse of strong teeth, white as almonds, but irregular. Thick glossy whiskers framed the pale face with its purpled patches; while the tawny red of the hair, cropped close in front, but left to grow at the sides and

back of the head, did their part to perfection in bringing out all the strangeness, all the signs of fate, in the man's appearance. His short thick neck seemed to tempt the hatchet of the law.

At this moment the slanting shafts of sunlight fell full upon the faces of the three people at whom the dog looked up in turn; and the theatre in which the scene was enacted was, moreover, a most noble one.

The circular space lay at the furthest extremity of the park of Gondreville, one of the finest estates in France and unquestionably the finest in the department of the Aube, with its château built from Mansard's designs, its magnificent avenues of elm trees, its fifteen hundred acres of park enclosed with walls, its nine large farms, its forest, mills, and meadows. Before the Revolution this almost princely domain belonged to the Simeuse family. Ximeuse is a fief in Lorraine. The name is pronounced *Simeuse*, and in the end the spelling followed the pronunciation.

The great fortune of the Simeuses, a noble family attached to the House of Burgundy, dated back to the times when the Guises overshadowed the Valois. Afterwards, neither Richelieu nor Louis XIV forgot their devotion to the factious House of Lorraine, and the Simeuses were out of favour at court. So the marquis of that day — an old Burgundian, an old Guisard, Leaguer, and Frondeur, heir to the four great grudges which the noblesse bare the crown — came to live at Cinq-Cygne, a courtier driven from the court of the Louvre. He had married the widow of the Comte de Cinq-Cygne, the younger branch of the great House of Chargebœuf, one of the most illustrious families of Champagne; though the Cinq-Cygnes were wealthier than the elder line and at least as famous.

And so it came to pass that the Marquis de Simeuse, one of the richest nobles of the age, built Gondreville instead of ruining himself at court, and rounded out the estate with broad lands simply to add to his great game

preserves. It was he who built the Hôtel de Simeuse, near the Hôtel de Cinq-Cygne at Troyes (the two old mansions and the bishop's palace were the only stone buildings in the city for a long while), and it was he, likewise, who sold Ximeuse to the Duke of Lorraine.

His son wasted his father's savings and even broke into his fine fortune during the reign of Louis XV, but he entered the navy, became a commodore and a vice-admiral, and redeemed his youthful follies by splendid services to the state. The Admiral's eldest son, the Marquis de Simeuse, died on the scaffold at Troyes during the Revolution, leaving twin sons who at that moment were following the fortunes of the House of Condé as *émigrés*.

The great circular space was the place where the hunt met in the time of the Great Marquis (for so the builder of Gondreville was called in the family), and a hunting lodge had been built within the park walls in the time of Louis XIV. It was here in the Cinq-Cygne lodge, as it was called, that Michu had lived since 1789. The village of Cinq-Cygne lay on the edge of the Forest of Nodesme (a corruption of *Notre Dame*), and the way to the village was through the double avenue of elm trees, the quarter in which Couraut got wind of spies. The lodge had fallen completely into disuse since the time of the Great Marquis, the Admiral knew more of the court or the high seas than of his lands in Champagne, and his son, the late Marquis, had made over the dilapidated house to Michu for a dwelling.

It was a noble brick building with reticulated cornerstones and facings. A handsome but rust-eaten wrought-iron gateway on either side abutted upon a broad deep ha-ha with great trees springing up on its sides, and parapets bristling with iron scroll-work, which confronted intruders with a formidable array of spikes.

The park walls only began beyond the circumference of the circle. The imposing half-moon without was enclosed

by a bank with elm trees growing upon it; the corresponding inner half being outlined by clumps of foreign trees. So the hunting lodge stood exactly in the centre of the space traced out by the two horseshoes.

Michu used the great rooms on the ground floor as stable, cow shed, and kitchen. Nothing of all the ancient splendour of the place was left save the hall paved with marble, white and black, which you entered from the side of the park, by one of those glass doors with little square panes, which you used to see at Versailles before Louis Philippe turned that palace into a hospital for the departed 'glories of France.'

Within, the lodge was divided in two by a wooden staircase, old-fashioned and worm-eaten, but not wanting in character. There were five somewhat low rooms on the first floor, and a vast garret up above in the roof, for the venerable edifice was crowned by a four-sided roof, terminating in a ridge with a leaden finial at either end by way of ornament.

Michu stored his fodder in this garret, which was lighted by four bull's-eye windows of the kind affected, and not without reason, by Mansard; for the flat Italian roof and low attic storey is an absurdity against which our French climate protests.

The park about the old hunting-lodge was planned out in the English fashion. A lake, or rather a sheet of water that once had been a lake and was now a mere pond, well stocked with fish, manifested its presence by a film of mist that hung above the tree-tops, and, no less, by the croaking of hundreds of frogs and sounds made by noisy amphibious creatures after sunset. The pervading sense of crumbling age and decay, the deep silence in the woods, the avenue stretching away into the distance, the far-off forest, the rust-eaten ironwork, the massive stones clad in velvet moss, — these and a thousand little things combined to lend an idyllic grace to a building which remains to this day.

At the time of the opening of this story, Michu was leaning against the moss-covered parapet. His powder-flask, cap, and handkerchief were lying on the wall beside him, together with a screwdriver, some bits of rag and odd tools required for his suspicious operations. His wife was sitting just outside the lodge, almost under the doorway where the richly-carved armorial bearings of the Simeuse family and their noble motto *Si meurs!* still remained intact; and her mother, dressed like a peasant woman, had put her chair just in front, so that Madame Michu's feet might rest on the rungs and not on the damp ground.

'Is the boy here?' Michu asked of his wife.

'He is roaming somewhere about the pond,' said the mother; 'he is crazy over frogs and insects.'

Michu gave an alarming whistle, and his son came running up at once. Evidently the bailiff at Gondreville was master in his own house, and since 1789, and still more since 1793, he had done pretty much as he liked on the estate. His wife and her mother, a young lad named Gaucher, and Marianne, the servant girl, were all afraid of him, and so was everybody else for a score of miles around. The causes of this feeling of terror should perhaps be given without further delay, for in this way Michu's portrait will be completed by a sketch of his character.

The old Marquis de Simeuse had parted with most of his property in 1790; but events moved too quickly for him; he had not time to put the great Gondreville estate in trustworthy hands. Accused of corresponding with the Duke of Brunswick and the Prince of Coburg, the Marquis de Simeuse and his wife were imprisoned and condemned to death by the Revolutionary Tribunal of Troyes, under the presidency of Madame Michu's father. The great estate was therefore sold by the nation. People noticed at the time, with something like a thrill of horror, that the old Marquis's head gamekeeper, the president of the Arcis Jacobin club, had come to Troyes to be

present at the execution. Michu was an orphan, and the son of a simple peasant. The Marquise had loaded him with kindnesses; she had taken him as a child into the château and had given him the head keeper's place. Lofty patriotism regarded Michu as a second Brutus; but no one in the country-side would recognize him after that piece of flagrant ingratitude.

The buyer of the estate was a man from Arcis, one Marion, whose grandfather had been land-steward to the Simeuses. This Marion, a barrister before and after the Revolution, was afraid of the keeper, and employed him as bailiff with a salary of three thousand livres and a commission on the sales of timber. Michu was supposed to have some ten thousand francs of his own already, when, with his reputation for patriotism to recommend him, he married the daughter of a tanner at Troyes. His father-in-law was the apostle of Revolution in the town and the president of the Revolutionary Tribunal. A man of convictions, not unlike Saint Just in character, he was mixed up afterwards in the Babeuf conspiracy and committed suicide to escape trial. Marthe, his daughter, was the prettiest girl in Troyes, and therefore she had been obliged by her formidable parent to personate the Goddess of Liberty on a Republican high day.

Marion, the proprietor of Gondreville, scarcely came to the place three times in seven years. His grandfather had been the Simeuses' land-steward; and all Arcis believed at the time that Citizen Marion really represented the Marquis's two sons. As for the bailiff of Gondreville, as a devoted patriot and the son-in-law of the president of the Revolutionary Tribunal at Troyes, he was greatly in favour with Malin, one of the representatives of the department of the Aube, and people treated him with a certain respect so long as the Terror lasted. But after the decline of the Mountain and the tanner's suicide, Michu became the scapegoat of his party. All the blame of many violent deeds was

thrown upon the dead man and his son-in-law, though in truth the latter had neither art nor part in them. Then the bailiff of Gondreville stood up for himself and assumed a hostile attitude in the face of the crowd that did him this injustice. He showed a bold front in words. But the 18th Brumaire came and went, and Michu relapsed into a profound silence, the philosophy of the strong. He made no more protest against public opinion, he was satisfied to act; this prudence gained him a reputation for sly cunning, for he possessed about a hundred thousand francs in land. Michu's money had been made in perfectly legitimate ways. His salary and commission amounted to six thousand francs per annum, and he had inherited his wife's father's property. But though he had been bailiff of Gondreville for a dozen years, and anybody who chose to do so could calculate the amount of his savings, the old outcry against the Jacobin was raised again when he bought a farm worth fifty thousand francs towards the close of the Consulate. At Arcis people said that Michu meant to redeem his character by making a lot of money. And, unluckily, just as this affair was dying out of people's memories, a trifling incident set rancorous tongues gossiping in the countryside, and revived the general belief in the ferocity of the bailiff's character.

Coming home one evening from Troyes in the company of several peasants, Michu chanced to drop a paper on the high-road. The tenant of Cinq-Cygne, who knew how to read, was walking behind the rest. He stooped and picked it up. Michu turned, and saw the farmer with the paper in his hands. In a moment he drew his pistol from his belt, cocked the weapon, and threatened to blow the man's brains out if he read a word of the paper. It all happened so suddenly, Michu's behaviour was so violent, the tone of his voice so awful, and his eyes glared so fiercely, that the men all felt a cold chill of terror. Naturally Michu made an enemy of the tenant of Cinq-Cygne.

Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne, the Simeuses' cousin, had but the one farm for her fortune. She lived at the château of Cinq-Cygne; and her whole life was devoted to the twin cousins, her playmates as a child at Troyes and Gondreville. Her only brother, Julian de Cinq-Cygne, left France earlier than the Simeuses, and had fallen before Mayence; but the house of Cinq-Cygne possessed a sufficiently rare privilege of which more must be said by-and-by, the heiress of the house transmitted the title in default of heirs male. This affair between Michu and the tenant caused a terrific hubbub in the country-side and darkened the gloomy mystery that hung about Michu; nor was this the only circumstance which gained him a formidable name.

A few months went by, and Citizen Marion came to Gondreville. He brought with him Citizen Malin. Political events had turned out so well for Malin and Arcis that the First Consul had given him a seat at the Council of State as a reward for his services on the 18th Brumaire. Marion had sold the estate to Malin (so rumour ran), and politicians in the little town of Arcis now discovered that Marion had been Malin's stalking-horse all along and not a cover for the MM. Simeuse. The all-powerful Councillor of State was the great man of Arcis. He had sent one of his political allies to the prefecture at Troyes; he had exempted the son of one of the Gondreville tenants, one Beauvisage, from military service; he was everybody's friend. Consequently, there was no one to say a word against the bargain in the whole country-side, where Malin reigned and still reigns supreme.

It was just in the dawn of the Empire. People who read about the French Revolution to-day in history books will never have any idea of the immense distances travelled by public opinion between the events that come so thickly together. The need of peace and quiet after violent commotion was so generally felt that the most serious matters were forgotten in a very short time. Events were

ripened continually by new and burning interests and soon became ancient history. So nobody except Michu looked curiously into the past; and the bargain seemed perfectly simple to other eyes. Marion had bought Gondreville for six hundred thousand francs in *assignats*, he sold it for a million in current coin; but Malin paid nothing out of his pocket except the fees for the registration of title. Grévin, an old comrade of Malin's in the days when both were ecclesiastics, naturally favoured this piece of jobbery. He had his reward. The Councillor of State made him a notary at Arcis.

When the new owner came to the lodge, brought thither by the tenant of Grouage (the farm that lay to the left of the great avenue, between the park and the forest), Michu's face grew white; he left the house. He went off in search of Marion, whom he found at last alone in one of the broad walks in the park.

'Are you selling Gondreville, sir?'

'Yes, Michu, yes. You will have an influential master. The Councillor is one of the First Consul's friends, and very well acquainted with all the Ministry. He will do well by you.'

'Then were you keeping the place for *him* all along?'

'I do not say that,' replied Marion. 'I did not know how to invest the money at the time, and I thought I should be safe if I put it into the National lands; but I do not care about keeping a place that belonged to the family, when my father was ——'

'A servant in their house, their steward!' Michu interrupted fiercely. 'But you are not going to sell the place; I want it, and I can pay you for it, myself ——'

'*You?*'

'Yes, I. I mean it! eight hundred thousand francs and in good gold ——'

'Eight hundred thousand francs! Where did you get them?' asked Marion.

'That is no affair of yours,' returned Michu. Then in a milder tone and lowered voice he added, 'My wife's father saved a good many livres.'

'You are too late, Michu. The thing is done now.'

'You can put it off, sir!' exclaimed the bailiff, and catching at his employer's hand he held it in a vice-like grip. 'People hate me; I want to be rich and powerful; I must have Gondreville! and I don't care a straw for my life, mind you; so sell the land to me or I will blow your brains out!'

'But anyhow I must have time to back out of it with Malin, and he is not of an accommodating turn ——'

'I will give you twenty-four hours. If you say a word about this, I shall think no more of cutting off your head than of slithering a turnip.'

Marion and Malin left the château that night. Marion was frightened; he told the Councillor about his interview and advised him to keep an eye on his bailiff. It was too late to go back on the bargain; Marion was obliged to make over the estate to the man who had actually paid for it; and it seemed to him that Michu was not the man to understand or admit such a reason. Moreover, it was understood that this service rendered to Malin was to lay the foundation of a political fortune for Marion and his brother. And so it proved. In 1806 Advocate Marion became president of an Imperial court through Malin's influence, and afterwards, when receivers-general were instituted, Marion's brother was appointed to the department of the Aube. Malin recommended Marion to remove to Paris, and spoke to the Minister of Police, who put a special guard over the threatened man. But Michu was still bailiff of the Gondreville estate, under the ferule of the Arcis notary; Malin did not wish to drive him to extremities, or perhaps he thought that he could the better keep a watch on him.

From this time forth Michu grew more and more

thoughtful and taciturn; and people looked upon him as a man capable of ugly deeds. A Councillor of State under the First Consul was as powerful as a Minister. Malin played a great part in Paris. He was one of the commissioners employed upon the Code. He bought one of the finest mansions in the Faubourg Saint Germain after his marriage with the daughter of a rich contractor named Sibuelle, who had fallen into disgrace. After receivers-general were instituted, this worthy was associated with Marion's brother in the department of the Aube. So Malin only once came back to Gondreville; he left Grévin to look after his interests there.

After all, what had he, the sometime representative of the Aube, to fear from an ex-president of the Arcis Jacobin club? Yet, the townspeople not unnaturally shared the peasants' bad opinion of Michu; and Marion, Malin, and Grévin, without committing themselves, took it for granted that he was an extremely dangerous character. Nor did the action of the authorities, who had orders from head-quarters to keep the bailiff under police supervision, tend to destroy this opinion. People began to wonder how it was that Michu kept his place, and finally decided that the master was too much afraid of his bailiff to turn him out. After this who can fail to understand the meaning of the deep melancholy of Marthe's expression?

Marthe had been piously brought up from the first by her mother. Both women were good Catholics. The tanner's opinions and conduct had given them pain. The red colour came into Marthe's face whenever she thought of the day when she was dressed as a goddess and paraded about the city of Troyes. Her father forced her to marry Michu; she was too much afraid of her husband to judge him, but his bad reputation grew worse. And yet she felt that he loved her; in the depths of her woman's heart there was a very true and real affection for the terrible revolutionary. She had never seen him do anything

that was not right; he never spoke a rough word to her, at any rate; nay, he tried to guess her every wish. He was almost always out of the house, for he thought, poor pariah, that his presence was disagreeable to her. Marthe and Michu, mutually distrustful, might be said to live in an armed neutrality, to use the modern phrase.

For seven years people had pointed the finger at her as the executioner's daughter and the wife of a husband branded as a traitor. Marthe felt it keenly. Beauvisage, the tenant of Bellache, the farm in the plain to the right of the avenue, used to come past the lodge, and often she had heard the man say: —

'That is Judas's house!'

Beauvisage was attached to the Simeuses.

The bailiff seemed to have done his best to complete the extraordinary resemblance to the thirteenth apostle, to which, in fact, he owed the horrible nickname given to him all over the country-side. And it was this trouble, and certain vague but ever-present forebodings that made Marthe look grave and thoughtful. Nothing brings more deep dejection than the sense of undeserved and hopeless degradation. A painter surely might have made a great picture of this little group of pariahs, in one of the loveliest spots in that Champagne country, where the landscape is usually so dreary.

'François!' shouted the bailiff to hasten the boy's speed.

François Michu, a child of ten, was free of the park and forest where he levied his little tithe, ate the fruit, went a-hunting, and knew no trouble nor care. He was the one happy creature in a household cut off from the rest of the world by the forest and the park; and no less cut off from their kind by a feeling of repulsion in which every one shared.

'Just pick up these things,' said Michu, pointing to the parapet, 'and put this away. Look me in the face! You ought to love your father and mother, eh?'

For answer the child jumped up to kiss his father, but Michu turned to take up the rifle and pushed him away.

'Good! You have blabbed sometimes about things that are done here,' he continued, fixing two eyes, formidable as a wildcat's, upon the child. 'Now mind this; if you tell tales of the smallest thing that happens here to Gaucher or to the folk at Bellache or Grouage, or even to Marianne that is so fond of us, you will be the death of your father. Don't let this happen again, and I will forgive you for yesterday's prattle.'

The little one began to cry.

'Don't cry; but if anybody asks you any questions, say "I don't know," as the peasants do. There are people prowling about the country, and I don't like the looks of them. There! You understood, didn't you?' added Michu, turning to the women. 'So keep still tongues in your head.'

'What are you going to do, dear?'

Michu was carefully measuring a charge of powder and loading his rifle. He laid the weapon down on the parapet and said to Marthe, 'Nobody knows that I have this rifle; come, and stand here in front!'

Couraut got up, barking furiously.

'That's a good sharp dog!" exclaimed Michu; 'there are spies about, I am certain ——'

The presence of a spy can always be felt. Couraut and Michu seemed to have but one and the same life; they lived like an Arab and his horse in the desert. Michu knew the meaning of every sound that Couraut made, as well as the dog could read the expression of his master's face and knew his thoughts by instinct.

'What do you say to that?' Michu exclaimed in a whisper, as two suspicious-looking persons appeared in a side walk, and came towards them.

'What is going on hereabouts? They are from Paris,' said the old mother.

'Aha! That's the way,' said Michu. 'Just hide my rifle,' he added, in his wife's ear. 'They are coming towards us.'

The two men from Paris, now crossing the gravelled space, might have served as types for a painter. The one, and seemingly the inferior, wore high boots with tops turned down rather lower than usual to afford a view of a pair of roguish calves covered with striped silk stockings of dubious cleanliness. His ribbed, apricot-coloured breeches fastened with metal buttons were a trifle too ample, and comfortably slack about his person, and it was evident from the position of the worn creases that he was a man of sedentary habits. A quilted waistcoat, loaded with embroidery and fastened by one button only across the chest, contributed to a general air of slovenliness that was further increased by the black corkscrew curls which hid his forehead and hung about his cheeks. A blue and white cameo pin adorned his shirt front, and a double line of steel watch-chain hung below his waist. His cinnamon-brown coat would have caught the eye of a caricaturist at once, for the long tail behind exactly resembled the codfish from which the garment took its name. The codfish-tail coat was in fashion for ten years. Napoleon's empire lasted not much longer.

A limp and very voluminous cravat enabled this individual to muffle himself to the nose in its voluminous folds. A pimpled countenance, a long, swollen, brick-red nose, high-coloured cheek bones, a toothless but appalling, sensual mouth, a low forehead, and ears adorned with thick gold rings, were seemingly grotesque features made terrible by two little slits of eyes, set like a pig's eyes in the man's head; there was obdurate greed in them, and a jovial, and, so to speak, hilarious cruelty. Those keen-sighted, burrowing eyes of freezing and frozen blue, might have been taken as a model for that formidable Eye which the police took for their emblem during the Revo-

lution. This worthy wore black silk gloves and carried a little switch. He was unmistakably an official personage; there was that in his bearing and in his manner of taking snuff and thrusting it into his nostrils, which told of the self-importance of an understrapper of the Government — the man who magnifies his office when clothed with a little brief authority from high quarters.

His companion's costume was in the same taste, but it was elegant and elegantly worn, and care was expended upon all its details. He wore tight-fitting breeches and boots *à la Suwarrow* which creaked as he walked. His shirt collar reached the tips of his ears, valuable trinkets adorned his person, and he wore a spencer over his coat, an aristocratic fashion adopted by the Clichyens and gilded youth of the Revolution and destined to survive both gilded youth and Clichyens. Fashions in dress outlived political parties in those days, a sure sign of unsettlement which reappeared even in 1830. This perfect *muscadin* seemed to be about thirty years of age; he had the air of a well-bred man and a consciousness of some kind of superiority seemed to lurk beneath coxcombry that almost reached the pitch of insolence. His pallid countenance looked as though there was not a single drop of blood in it; there was a sardonic turn about the sharp, short nose; it put you in mind of a skull, and the green eyes were inscrutable; they told no more than the thin, pinched lips chose to tell.

The man in the cinnamon-brown coat seemed almost genial, compared with this thin, wizened young man, who twirled a rattan cane with a gold knob that glittered in the sunshine; the first might be willing to take the executioner's place; but the second would not hesitate to ensnare innocence and beauty and virtue in the toils of slander and intrigue, and drowned or poisoned his victims with perfect equanimity. The red-faced man would have tried to cheer up the victim with rough jokes; the other would not so much as smile. The first, a man of forty-five, had evi-

dently a weakness for women and good cheer. Such men have always some appetite which makes them the slaves of their calling. But his companion had neither vices nor passions. He was a born spy; he was in the diplomatic service; his was a love of art for art's sake. He found the ideas, his fellow carried them out; he represented the thought, the other was its outward and visible manifestation.

'This must surely be Gondreville, my good woman,' the younger man began.

'People hereabouts don't say "my good woman,"' answered Michu. 'We plain folk still call each other plain "citizen" and "citizeness" out here.'

'Oh!' returned the young man, in the most natural way in the world. He did not seem to be at all put out.

It sometimes happens that a card player, in the middle of a run of luck, feels that his luck is broken at the sight of a new face opposite; the man's voice, manner, and expression, like his way of shuffling the cards, are so many warnings of defeat. All gamblers, and écarté players especially, know this sensation. Michu felt something of the kind, a prophetic collapse. Dim forebodings of death, a confused vision of the scaffold, flashed across his mind; a voice cried that this *muscadin* would be his death, though as yet the two men were total strangers. So he had spoken rudely; he was and meant to be uncivil.

'You are State Councillor Malin's man, aren't you?' asked the second man from Paris.

'I am my own master,' returned Michu.

The younger man turned to the women, and said, in the most polite manner, 'Are we at Gondreville, ladies? That is all we want to know; M. Malin is expecting us.'

'There is the park,' said Michu, pointing to the open iron gate.

'And why are you hiding that rifle, my pretty child?' said the jovial personage (he had caught a glimpse of the barrel as he came through the gate).

'Always at it, even in the country,' smiled the younger man. A thought struck them both; they turned back, and Michu read their suspicions in spite of their impassive faces. Marthe allowed them to look at the rifle, Couraut barking all the time; she felt convinced that her husband was meditating some dark deed, and was almost pleased by the strangers' perspicacity. Michu flung her a glance that made her tremble; then he took up the rifle and set about loading it with a bullet, accepting all the consequences of the encounter and risk of possible detection. It seemed as if he did not value his life in the least, and his wife clearly understood his fatal resolution.

'So you have wolves in these parts, have you?' asked the younger man.

'There are always wolves wherever there are sheep. You are in Champagne, and yonder there is a forest. But we have wild boars as well, and we have big and small game, we have some of all sorts,' said Michu, in a sarcastic tone.

The two men exchanged glances, and the older said, 'I'll wager, Corentin, that this is that Michu fellow——'

'We did not herd pigs together that I know of,' said the bailiff.

'No, but we have presided over Jacobins, citizen,' returned the cynical elder,—'you at Arcis, and I elsewhere. You keep up the courtesy of the carmagnole, but it is out of fashion now, my boy.'

'The park is large, I think we might lose ourselves in it; since you are the bailiff, you can show us the way to the château,' the man addressed as Corentin remarked in a peremptory tone.

Michu whistled for his boy and continued to ram home the charge. Corentin looked Marthe over with indifferent eyes, whereas his companion seemed to be charmed with her; but Corentin saw traces of anguish that escaped the notice of the old libertine who took alarm at the rifle. And

in this little, yet important trifle, the two men's whole characters were revealed.

'I have an appointment on the other side of the forest,' said Michu; 'I cannot go with you myself, but my boy here will show you the way to the château. What way can you have come to Gondreville? Did you go round by Cinq-Cygne?'

'Like you, we had something on hand in the forest,' said Corentin, without a trace of irony in his manner.

'François!' called Michu, 'show these gentlemen the way to the château; take them along the bye-paths, so that they will meet no one on the way; they are to keep clear of beaten tracks. — Come here a minute!' he added, seeing that the two men had turned their backs and walked away, talking together in a low voice.

Michu caught up the child and kissed him almost solemnly, with a look in his face that confirmed his wife's fears. A cold shiver ran down her back; she looked at her mother, but her eyes were dry; she was past crying.

'Off with you,' said Michu, addressing the boy. And he watched him out of sight.

Couraut began to bark again, this time in the direction of Grouage.

'Oh! there's Violette. That is the third time that he has been past here since the morning. What can be going on? That will do, Couraut!'

A few minutes later they heard a horse come trotting on the road, and Violette, mounted on one of the ponies much in use among farmers round about Paris, showed his face. It was a deeply wrinkled countenance, the colour of wood, looking all the darker under the shadow of a round, broad-brimmed hat. His grey, malevolent, bright eyes dissembled the treachery of his character. A pair of thin legs, covered to the knees with linen gaiters, hung unsupported by the stirrups, so that they were kept in position, to all appearance, by the weight of his thick, hobnailed

boots. His grey hair fell in curls at the back of his head over a *limousine*, a rough black and white striped carter's cloak, which he wore over his short jacket. The man's clothes, his short-legged grey pony, his way of riding, with his chest thrown out and shoulders thrown back, the jagged and worn bridle held in a coarse, chapped, earth-coloured hand,—everything about Violette gave the impression that this was a grasping, ambitious peasant, who means to own land and will have it at all costs. The line of his mouth, with its bluish lip, might have been cut by a surgeon's bistoury; his face and forehead were so furrowed by innumerable wrinkles, that all flexibility was lost, and such expression as it possessed lay wholly in the contours. There seemed to be a menace in the hard, sharply cut lines, in spite of the air of humility which almost all country people can assume to hide their feelings and their schemes, a humility which answers the same purpose as the imperturbable gravity of the Oriental and the savage.

Violette had been a day labourer. He had come to be the servant of Grouage by a system of ever-increasing malevolence, and he still kept up that system though he had reached a position far above his first aspirations. He wished ill to his neighbour and he wished it fervently; if he had the chance he would help him to ill-luck, and it was a labour of love. Violette was frankly envious, but with all his malevolence, he kept within the limits of the law, precisely as the Opposition does, and neither more nor less. It was his belief that his own success depended upon the failure of others; every one above him was an enemy against whom any weapons were fair. This is a very common type of character among the peasants. His great affair of the moment was to obtain from Malin an extension of his lease, which had but six years to run. He was jealous of Michu's success, so he kept a close watch over him. The peasants used to tease Violette about his intimacy with the Michus; but with a hope of

another twelve years' lease before his eyes, the cunning farmer was on the watch to do a service to the Government or to Malin, and he knew that Malin distrusted Michu. With the help of the gamekeeper at Gondreville, the rural policeman, and the peasant folk that gathered firewood, Violette kept the commissary at Arcis informed of every little thing that Michu did. That functionary had failed to enlist Marianne, the servant-girl, in the interests of the Government; but Violette and his confederates knew all that went on through Gaucher, the lad, bribing him with trifles, such as waistcoats, buckles, cotton stockings, and nice things to eat. Michu trusted Gaucher, and the boy, for that matter, had no suspicion that his gossip could do any harm. Michu did not know that Violette blackened and distorted everything that he did, and made a crime of every action with the wildest suppositions; but he knew the man's vile motive for coming so often to the house, and amused himself by mystifying him.

'What, here again! You must have a good deal to do over at Bellache,' said Michu.

'Again! is a word of reproach, M. Michu. You don't reckon to play the sparrows a tune on such a clarionet, do you? I did not know you had that rifle ——'

'It came up in one of my fields where rifles grow,' returned Michu. 'Stay, this is how I sow them.' He pointed the gun at a viper thirty paces away and cut the reptile in two.

'Did you get that highwayman's weapon to protect your master? Perhaps he made you a present of it.'

'Came down from Paris on purpose,' said Michu.

'It is a fact that there is a good deal of talk about his journey, all over the country-side. Some say that he is in disgrace, and some that he wants to see his way clear here.—And, come to think of it, why should he drop down on us without a word of warning, just like the First Consul?'

'I am not such a friend of his as to be in his confidence.'

'Then you have not seen him yet?'

'I did not know that he was here till I came back from my round in the forest,' said Michu, reloading his rifle.

'He has sent to Arcis for M. Grévin; they will be tribuning something or other.'

(Malin had been a tribune once.)

'If you are going in the direction of Cinq-Cygne, you can take me with you; I am going that way,' said Michu, turning to Violette.

But Violette was too timorous to take such a man as Michu up behind him; he set spurs to his horse; and the Judas of Gondreville, gun on shoulder, made a dash for the avenue.

'Who can Michu have in his mind?' said Marthe when he had gone.

'He has looked very dark ever since he knew that M. Malin was here,' said her mother. 'But it is damp; let us go in.'

The two women were sitting in the chimney-corner when Couraut began to bark.

'There is Michu!' cried Marthe.

And indeed it was Michu who came upstairs. His wife in anxiety went to him in their room.

'See if there is any one in the house,' he said in an unsteady voice.

'No one,' she said; 'Marianne is out in the field with the cow, and Gaucher——'

'Where is Gaucher?'

'I do not know.'

'I have my doubts of that young rogue. Go up to the garret and make a thorough search; look for him in every nook and corner in the place.'

Marthe went. When she came back again, her husband was on his knees at his prayers.

'What is the matter?" she asked, in dismay. Michu

put his arm about her waist, drew her towards him, kissed her on her forehead, and said unsteadily, 'If we are never to see each other again, you ought to know how much I have loved you, my poor wife. There is a letter for you in a round tin box buried at the foot of the larch yonder in that clump of trees,' he continued after a pause, indicating the tree as he spoke. 'Follow the instructions in the letter from point to point. Do not touch it till after my death. After all, whatever may happen to me, think, in spite of men's injustice, that this arm of mine dealt justice for God.'

Marthe's face had grown paler and paler till she was white as her linen. Her eyes were wide with terror; she gazed fixedly at her husband, and tried to speak, but her throat was parched. Michu slipped from her like a shadow. He had tied Couraut fast to the bed-foot, and the animal began to howl in despair.

Michu had serious cause to be angry with M. Marion; but all his anger was transferred to a man far more criminal in his opinion, and that man was Malin. Malin's secrets were open to the bailiff's eyes. No one was so well qualified to appreciate the State Councillor's conduct. In matters political, Michu's father-in-law had been in Malin's confidence at the time when Malin was nominated, through Grévin's diligence, to represent the Aube in the Convention.

Perhaps it may be worth while to explain how the Simeuses and the Cinq-Cygnes came to confront Malin, and to show that the circumstances that weighed so heavily on the destiny of the twins and Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne, weighed yet more heavily on Marthe and Michu.

The Hôtel Cinq-Cygne at Troyes stood opposite the Hôtel Simeuse. When a populace let loose by hands no less cunning than prudent had sacked the Hôtel Simeuse; when the Marquis and Marquise had been discovered and

delivered over to the National Guard, who took them to prison on a charge of corresponding with the enemies of the Nation; then the mob, arguing logically, raised the shout, 'To the Cinq-Cygnes!' It was inconceivable to them that the Cinq-Cygnes should be innocent of the crimes of the Simeuses.

The brave old Marquis de Simeuse had two sons, two lads of eighteen; he was afraid that their courage might get them into trouble; and to save them he sent them, a few minutes before the storm broke, to their aunt, the Comtesse de Cinq-Cygne. Two attached servants locked the young men into the house. The old Marquis bade them keep everything from his sons' knowledge if the worst came to the worst. Laurence de Cinq-Cygne, then a girl of twelve, loved both her cousins equally, nor of the two brothers could it be said which loved her best. The likeness between the two Simeuses, as often happens with twins, was so strong that for a long while their mother dressed them in different colours so as to know them apart. The first born was named Paul Marie; the younger, Marie Paul.

Laurence de Cinq-Cygne was in the secret of the situation; the girl played a woman's part excellently well. She coaxed and implored, and kept her cousins in the house till the mob surrounded the Hôtel Cinq-Cygne. The brothers learned the danger at the same moment, and exchanged their thoughts in a single glance. They decided on their course at once. Their two servants and the Comtesse's men were armed, the doors barricaded, the shutters closed, and the two young men appeared at a window with five servants behind them and the Abbé d'Hauteserre, a relative of the Cinq-Cygnes. The eight brave men opened a murderous fire on the mob. Every shot killed or wounded an assailant. Laurence, instead of giving way to despair, loaded and reloaded for them with extraordinary coolness, and served out bullets and powder.

The Comtesse de Cinq-Cygne threw herself on her knees and began to pray.

'What are you doing, mother?' asked Laurence.

'I am praying for them and for you.'

Sublime words spoken once before under similar circumstances, by the mother of the Prince de la Paix in Spain. Eleven men were killed and lay among the wounded in the street. A reception of this kind may have a cooling or an exciting effect on a mob; they either warm to their work or they give up. The men in front fell back in panic, but the crowd behind had come to plunder and slay, and at the sight of their dead, they raised a howl of 'Murder!'

Prudent folk went off in search of the Representative of the People. Meanwhile, the brothers had heard the history of the day's fatal events; they suspected the Representative of a wish to ruin their house; suspicion soon became a certainty, and hot for vengeance they took up their places under the arched gateway, loaded their guns ready to shoot down Malin as soon as he showed himself. The Countess lost her head completely; she saw her house in ashes, her daughter murdered before her eyes, and reproached her nephews for a gallant defence that set all France talking for a week. Laurence opened the door a few inches in reply to Malin's summons. At sight of her he came in, relying on his own formidable reputation and the child's helplessness. But when he demanded the reason for this armed resistance, she cut him short at the first word.

'What, sir, do you give liberty to France, and cannot protect people in their own houses? They want to murder us and pull down our hôtel; have we no right to keep them out by force?'

Malin stood nailed to the spot.

'You! the grandson of a bricklayer employed by the Great Marquis to build his château, allow our father to be dragged away to prison, on the strength of a slanderous lie!' cried Marie Paul.

Malin saw each young man clutch convulsively at his rifle, and gave himself up for lost. 'He shall be set at liberty,' he said.

'That promise of yours has saved your life,' Marie Paul said solemnly. 'But if it is not fulfilled by to-night, we shall know where to find you again.'

'As for that howling mob outside,' added Laurence, 'unless you send them away, the first shot from the window shall be for you. Now, M. Malin, go out!'

Malin went out and harangued the crowd. He talked about the sacredness of the hearth, the right of *habeas corpus*, and the fact that an Englishman's house is his castle. He said that the Law and the People were supreme; that the Law meant the People; that the People should only act through the Law, and that might should always be on the side of right. Dire necessity gave him eloquence. The mob dispersed. But he never forgot that scorn in the faces of the Simeuses, nor the tone of Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne's 'Go out!'

So, when the Cinq-Cygne lands were sold by the Nation (Laurence's brother, the Comte de Cinq-Cygne, being an *émigré*), the partition was made strictly. The agents of the District, acting on Malin's instructions, left Laurence nothing but the château, the park and gardens, and the farm of Cinq-Cygne, for Laurence had no right to more than her *légitime*, the minimum share of the inheritance secured by law to each child. The Nation stood in the place of the Comte de Gondreville, especially since he had taken arms against the Republic.

The night after this stormy outbreak, Laurence prayed her cousins to leave France. She begged so earnestly, fearing that Malin's treachery might ensnare them, that they took horse and reached the outposts of the Prussian army. They had scarcely reached the forest of Gondreville before the Hôtel Cinq-Cygne was surrounded. Malin, Representative of the People, came himself and in force to

arrest the heirs of the House of Simeuse. He did not venture to lay hands on the Comtesse de Cinq-Cygne, who was ill in bed with a terrible attack of nervous fever, nor yet on Laurence, a child of twelve. The servants, in terror of the Republic and its severity, had all disappeared.

Next morning the news of the stand made by the two brothers, and of their flight to Prussia, had spread all about the neighbourhood. Three thousand persons gathered in front of the Hôtel Cinq-Cygne, and the house was pulled down with inexplicable rapidity. Madame de Cinq-Cygne was removed to the Hôtel Simeuse, where she died in a second attack of fever.

Michu only appeared on the political scene after all these things had taken place, for the Marquis and Marquise remained in prison for five months. The representative of the Aube, meanwhile, was away on a mission. But now that Marion had sold Gondreville to Malin, and the popular ebullition was forgotten in the country, Michu understood Malin thoroughly, or at any rate thought that he understood him; for Malin, like Fouché, was one of those many-sided men with unfathomed depths under every side of their characters, who are inscrutable at the time, and can only be understood long after the game is over.

Before taking any important step in life, Malin never failed to take counsel with his faithful friend Grévin, the notary at Arcis. Grévin's judgment on men and things at a distance was sound, clear-sighted, and accurate. Such a habit is the wisdom of a second-rate man and the source of his strength. Now, in November 1803, the State Councillor's position was so critical that a letter might have compromised the friends. Malin's nomination as a senator was certain; he was afraid to have an explanation in Paris; so he left his town house and came out to Gondreville, choosing from among several reasons for his departure, that one which should give him an air of zeal in

Bonaparte's eyes, though he thought not of the State, but wholly of himself.

So while Michu lay in wait, and followed him in the park, watching like a savage, for the ripe moment for his revenge, the politic Malin, with his habit of squeezing his own advantage out of every event, had brought his friend to walk in a little space of grass in the English garden. It was a lonely spot, well adapted to secret conferences. The pair therefore were standing together in the middle of the grass plot, talking in such low tones that no one at a distance could overhear them, while they could change the conversation so soon as any listener approached.

'Why not have stayed in a room at the château?' asked Grévin.

'Did you not see those two men that the Prefect of Police has sent me?'

(Though Fouché had been the soul of the consular cabinet in the affair of the plot in which Pichegru, Georges, Moreau, and Polignac were involved, he was not at that time the Minister of Police, but an ordinary State Councillor like Malin himself.)

'Those two men are Fouché's two arms,' he continued. 'One of them put an end to the rising in the West in a fortnight in the year VII. That was that young *muscadin* with vinegar on his lips, and verjuice in his eyes, and a face like a decanter of lemonade. The other is one of Lenoir's brood, the only man to whom the great traditions of the old police were handed down. I simply asked for an ordinary detective, backed up by an accredited agent; and they send me yonder pair of sharpers. Ah! Grévin, Fouché has a mind to know my game, beyond a doubt. That is why I left those gentlemen to finish their dinner at the château. Let them look where they like, they will not find Louis XVIII there, nor the slightest clue.'

'Well and good; but what may this game be that you are playing?'

'Eh! a double game, my friend, is dangerous; but so far as Fouché is concerned, this is a triple game. I am in the confidence of the Bourbons, and it is possible that he has got wind of it.'

'You in the confidence of the Bourbons?'

'Yes.'

'Then you do not remember Favras?'

The remark seemed to make an impression on the Councillor.

'Since when?' continued Grévin after a pause.

'Since the Consul was appointed for life.'

'But there are no proofs?'

'Not *that!*' said Malin, clicking his thumb nail against his front teeth.

In a few words Malin gave his friend a concise sketch of the critical position into which Bonaparte was forcing England. The national existence of England was threatened by the camp at Boulogne. Malin explained the extent of a plan of invasion, of which France and Europe knew nothing, albeit Pitt had his suspicions of it. Then he sketched the critical position into which England in turn was forcing Bonaparte. A formidable coalition,—Prussia, Austria, and Russia,—subsidised by English gold, was to bring seven hundred thousand men into the field. And at the same time, France was encompassed by an appalling network of conspiracy which united the Mountain, the Chouans, the Royalist party, and the Princes.

'So long as Louis XVIII had three consuls to deal with, he believed that anarchy would continue, and, favoured by some movement or other, he hoped to play a return match for the 13th Vendémiaire and the 18th Fructidor,' said Malin. 'But this consulship for life has unmasked Bonaparte's designs. He will be Emperor before long. The sub-lieutenant of old days is thinking of founding a dynasty! So this time it is an attempt on his life; and they are setting about it even more cleverly than they did

in that Rue Saint Nicaise business. Pichegru, Georges, Moreau, and the Duc d'Enghien are in it, so are two of the Comte d'Artois' friends — Polignac and Rivière.'

'What a combination!' exclaimed Grévin.

'France is honeycombed with conspiracy under the surface. They want the assault to be general; no stone will be left unturned. A hundred energetic men with Georges at their head are to set upon the Consular Guard and the Consul, man to man.'

'Very well; denounce them.'

'The Consul, the Minister of Police, the Prefect, and Fouché have held some of the threads of this wide-spread web these two months past. But they do not know the whole extent of it; and at the present moment they are leaving almost all the conspirators at liberty, so as to find out all.'

'As to right,' continued the notary, 'the Bourbons have far more right to conceive and plan and execute an attempt against Bonaparte, than Bonaparte had to conspire on the 18th Brumaire against the Republic. He was a son of the Republic; he slew his mother; whereas the Bourbons want to come back to their house. The list of *émigrés* was closed, and names have been continually struck out of it; the Roman Catholic religion has been restored, and reactionary decrees are multiplied. I can understand that the Princes, seeing all this, know that their return would be a difficult business, not to say impossible. Bonaparte becomes the one obstacle in the way, and they wish to clear away the obstacle. Nothing more simple. If the conspirators fail, they are brigands; if they succeed, they will be heroes. Under the circumstances your hesitation seems to me to be natural enough.'

'This is the question,' said Malin. 'The Duc d'Enghien's head is to be flung down to the Bourbons, as the Convention flung down the head of Louis XVI to the

Kings of Europe; and Bonaparte must be made to do it. Then he will be as much implicated as the rest of us in the courses of the Revolution; or else the present idol of the French nation and their future Emperor will be hurled down, and the real throne will be raised on the wreck of his greatness. I am at the mercy of events; of a well-directed bullet; of another and more successful machine like the one in the Rue Saint Nicaise. I have not been told everything. The proposal was that I should rally the Council of State at the critical moment, and control the action of the legal machinery that will bring about the restoration of the Bourbons.'

'Wait,' suggested the notary.

'I cannot wait. I have only this present moment in which to make up my mind.'

'How so?'

'The two Simeuses are in the plot. They are here in the neighbourhood. I must either raise a pursuit, allow them to commit themselves and rid myself of them, or else protect them secretly. I asked for understrappers, and they send me the pick of their lynxes; and send them through Troyes so that they may have the gendarmerie at their orders.'

'Gondreville is a bird in the hand, the conspiracy is a bird in the bush,' pronounced Grévin. 'Neither Fouché nor Talleyrand, your two partners, are in it. Be aboveboard with them. What! every man that cut off King Louis's head is in the Government, France is full of buyers of National lands, and you must try to bring back those that will want Gondreville again! Unless the Bourbons are downright idiots they will be sure to pass a sponge over all that we have done. Warn Bonaparte.'

'A man of my rank does not stoop to denounce,' Malin answered quickly.

'Your rank?' cried Grévin, with a smile.

'I have been offered the Seals.'

'I can understand that you feel dazzled; it is my duty to see clearly through this political darkness, to smell the way out. Now it is impossible to foresee events that might bring back the Bourbons, when a General Bonaparte has eighty men-of-war and four hundred thousand men. It is an even harder thing, in political forecasts, to know how long it may be before a tottering power will fall. But Bonaparte's power is still in the growing stage, old fellow. . . . Is it not more likely that Fouché has set some one on to sound you, so as to know the bottom of your mind and get rid of you?'

'No. I am sure of the ambassador. And what is more, Fouché would not send me such a pair of apes; for I know them too well not to have my suspicions.'

'I am afraid of them,' answered Grévin. 'Why did Fouché send them, if he does not bear you a grudge, and has no wish to put you to the proof? Fouché is not the man to play such a trick without some reason for it.'

'That decides me!' exclaimed Malin. 'I shall never be at peace with those two Simeuses. Perhaps Fouché, who knows my position, has no mind to miss them, and thinks to get at Condé through them.'

'Eh! old man, the owner of Gondreville is not likely to be disturbed under Bonaparte!'

Malin happening to look up just then, caught sight of a gun-barrel gleaming among the leaves of a great lime tree.

'I thought I heard a click as if some one cocked a trigger, and I was not mistaken,' he remarked, as he took his stand behind the trunk of a large tree. The notary followed him, startled by the sudden move.

'It is Michu,' he said. 'I can see his red beard.'

'Don't look as if you were frightened,' resumed Malin, and he walked slowly away. 'What can the man want with owners of this place, for he certainly was not aiming at you,' he repeated again and again. 'If he overheard us, it is my duty to recommend him to the prayers of the con-

gregation! We should have done better to go out into the plain. Who the devil would have thought of distrusting the wind that blows?'

'Live and learn,' said the notary; 'but he was a long way off, and we were talking close together.'

'I will just mention it to Corentin,' returned Malin.

A few minutes later, Michu came home again with a white, drawn face.

'What is the matter with you?' cried his terrified wife.

'Nothing,' returned Michu. He saw that Violette was in the house; and for him the man's presence was like a thunderbolt.

Michu took a chair and sat down quietly by the fire. He drew out a letter from a tin canister, such as soldiers use to keep their papers in, and flung the sheet on the flames. This circumstance, and Marthe's deep sigh of relief as if some enormous weight were lifted off her mind, tickled Violette's curiosity not a little. Michu leant his rifle against the chimney-piece with wonderful coolness. Marianne and the mother and Marthe were spinning in the lamplight.

'Come, François,' said the bailiff. 'Come along to bed, will you!'

He took the child roughly by the waist and carried him off. Outside upon the staircase he dropped his voice to a whisper.

'Go down into the cellar,' he said in the little lad's ear. 'Take two bottles of Mâcon, empty out one-third of each, and fill them up with the cognac that stands on the shelf of bottles; then take another bottle and fill it half with white wine, and half with brandy. Do it very neatly, and put the three bottles on the top of the empty barrel by the cellar door. As soon as you hear me open the window, come out of the cellar, saddle my horse, ride off to the Knaves' Gibbet, and wait for me there.'

'The little rascal never will go to bed,' said Michu when he came back. 'He wants to do like grown-up people, and hear and see and know all that is going on. You set my folk a bad example, Daddy Violette.'

'Good Lord!' cried Violette, 'who has loosened your tongue? You never said so much in your life before.'

'Do you think that I let you come and spy on me, and don't see it? You are on the wrong track, Daddy Violette. If you were on my side instead of the side of them that bear me a grudge, I would do better yet for you than a renewal of your lease.'

'Better yet? What's that?' asked the rapacious peasant, opening wide eyes.

'I would sell you my land, cheap.'

'No bargain is cheap so long as there's something to pay,' Violette remarked sententiously.

'I want to leave the neighbourhood, and I will give you my farm at Mousseau, — steadings, standing crops, and live stock, — for fifty thousand francs.'

'Really?'

'Does that suit you?'

'Lord, one must see.'

'Let us talk it over. But I want a handsel.'

'I have nothing.'

'A word.'

'Two if you like!'

'Tell me who sent you here just now?'

'I had gone and come back again, and I thought I would just look in and wish you a good night.'

'Come back again and left your horse behind! For what kind of an idiot do you take me? It is a lie; you shall not have my farm.'

'Well, then, it was M. Grévin, it was. He said to me, "Violette, we want Michu; go and look for him, and if he is not in, wait till he comes." I thought he meant me to stop here for the evening.'

'Are those sharks from Paris still at the château?'

'Ah, I am not so sure; but there were people in the drawing-room.'

'You shall have my farm. Let us settle the business. Wife, go and find wine for the bargain. Bring us some of the best Roussillon, that belonged to the ex-Marquis. . . . We are not children. You will find a couple of bottles on the empty barrel by the cellar door, and a bottle of white wine.'

'It is a bargain,' said Violette, who never got flustered with liquor. 'Let us drink.'

'You have fifty thousand francs under the bricks on the floor of your bedroom, all along under the bed; and you are going to pay them over to me a fortnight after old Grévin has passed the contract.'

Violette's eyes were fixed in a stare on Michu's face; he grew ghastly pale.

'Aha! You come sneaking round an old hand of a Jacobin that had the honour to preside over the Arcis Club, and imagine that he will not see through you. I have eyes in my head. I saw that your floor had been newly laid, and I felt sure that you had not taken it up to sow corn there. Let us drink.'

Violette was troubled. He drank off a large glass without noticing the strength of the liquor; terror was like a hot iron in his vitals, and greed burned hotter than the brandy. He would have given a good deal to be at home again so as to change the position of his hoard. The three women smiled.

'Does that suit you?' continued Michu, refilling Violette's glass.

'Why, yes.'

'You will be under your own roof, you old rogue!'

Half an hour of warm discussion ensued over the date of taking possession and the endless points that peasants raise over a bargain. Assertions were made, and glasses

drained, there were specious promises and denials, and exclamations — 'That is true, eh!' — 'Quite true.' — 'That is my last word!' — 'As I said before!' — 'I wish I may have my throat cut if — ' — 'May the wine poison me if I am not telling the clean truth' — when in the midst of it all Violette lurched forward and lay with his head on the table; not tipsy, but dead drunk. Michu, watching him, had hurried to the window and opened it, when the man's eyes grew troubled.

'Where is that rascal Gaucher?' he asked, turning to his wife.

'He is in bed.'

'Go and sit across his door, Marianne,' said the bailiff, addressing the girl, 'and keep a watch on him. And you, mother, stay downstairs and just look after this spy here. Keep a sharp lookout, and don't open the door to any one but François. It is a matter of life and death!' he added in a deep voice. 'Every creature under this roof must say that I have not left the house to-night; stick to that with your heads on the block!' Then to his wife, 'Come, mother, come, put on your shoes and your coif, and we must be off! No questions; I am coming with you.'

For the last three quarters of an hour there had been a despotic, irresistible authority in the man's eyes and gestures. There is a mysterious source from which men draw this extraordinary power; it is common to the great captain who can flash fire through the ranks of men on the battlefield, to the great orator who carries away his audience, and, let us admit it, the great criminal draws on the same source for his most daring crimes. An invincible influence seems at such times to emanate from the man's brain; his words are fraught with it; his movements seem to inject his will into others. The three women knew instinctively that some dreadful crisis was at hand; they felt it in the swiftness of his actions. Michu's face was glistening, his forehead spoke, his eyes shone like stars; they

had seen the beads of sweat at the roots of his hair, and more than once his voice shook with impatience and rage. So Marthe obeyed him passively. Armed to the teeth, and gun on shoulder, Michu made a dash for the avenue, his wife followed close behind him, and in a few minutes they reached the cross-roads where François was waiting hidden among the brushwood.

'The boy has sense,' Michu remarked, as he noticed this. It was the first word that he had spoken. His wife had been running so fast that she was breathless and could not speak.

'Go back to the lodge, hide in the thickest tree by the house, and watch the country and the park,' said Michu, turning to his son. 'We are all abed, mind; we shall not open to anybody. Your grandmother is sitting up, but she will not stir until she hears you speak. Keep every word in mind. It is a matter of life and death for your father and mother. It must never come out in a court of law that we spent the night out of doors.'

These words were spoken in the child's ear. François slipped away through the bushes, like an eel through the mud, and Michu turned to his wife.

'Up with you,' he cried, 'and pray God to be with us. Hold tight! The mare may drop dead.'

The words were scarcely out of his mouth before the animal started off like a race-horse at a blow from Michu's heels and a strong grip of his knees. In a quarter of an hour they were clear of the forest. Michu had kept to the short cut, through the darkness, and they stood on the skirts of the wood, and saw the roof ridges of the château of Cinq-Cygne lying in the moonlight. Michu tied the horse to a tree, and sprang lightly up a knoll which overlooked the valley of Cinq-Cygne.

The château on which Marthe and Michu looked down for a moment was a picturesque detail in the landscape. It was neither large nor of any importance from an archi-

tectural point of view, yet it possessed a certain amount of archæological interest. The old fifteenth century edifice stood on rising ground, encircled by a large walled moat, still full of water. The walls were built of rubble, but they were seven feet thick, and the very plainness of the structure gave an admirable idea of the rough, warrior life of feudal times. It was a very quaint château, consisting of two massive reddish-coloured towers connected by a long building, with true *croisées* — mullion windows with stone bars in the form of a cross rudely carved like vine stems. The staircase rose outside the château in a pentagonal tower set in the middle of the front, and was only accessible through a narrow door with a pointed arch.

The ground floor and the first storey had been modernised in the time of Louis Quatorze, and the huge roof above had been pierced with dormer windows, each surmounted by a carved tympanum.

In front of the house spread a great lawn divided in two by a paved way through the middle. On either side of this lawn stood the various stables, cow sheds, and poultry yards, the bakery, and other outbuildings raised on the ruins of the two wings of the feudal castle. The great trees which grew on the lawn itself had only recently been felled. Two little huts in which the gardeners lived stood on either side of the bridge over the moat; the iron gateway between them was of feeble design and evidently modern. In former times no doubt the château had been a square building about a central court, with towers at the four angles and a massive round arched gateway to defend the drawbridge where the modern iron gateway stood. All this had disappeared, but the two massive towers with their pepper-box roofs had escaped destruction, and these with the bell turret in the middle formed the principal features of the village. The spire of the church, another old building only a few paces away, harmonised with the mass of the castle.

All the roofs and domes shone out brightly in the fitful gleams of moonlight. Michu was looking down upon the stately house in a way that worked a complete change in his wife's thoughts concerning him; his face was calmer, there was hope and a kind of pride in his expression. He looked round the horizon with a certain uneasiness, and listened to all the sounds over the country-side. It must have been nine o'clock by this time; the moon shone down upon the edge of the forest, and the knoll was most brightly lighted of all. This state of things the bailiff apparently considered to be dangerous, for he came down as though he were afraid of being seen. Yet there was not a sound to trouble the stillness in the beautiful valley shut in upon this side by the Forest of Nodesme.

Marthe, trembling and exhausted, was expecting something to happen after such a ride. For what were her services required? For a good deed or a crime? Michu came up and whispered, 'You are to go to the Comtesse de Cinq-Cygne; ask to speak with her, and when she comes, ask for a word with her in private. When no one can overhear you, say, "Mademoiselle, your cousins are in danger of their lives. Some one is waiting for you outside to explain the why and wherefore." If she seems afraid, if she cannot trust you, say, "They are involved in a plot against the First Consul and the plot is discovered." Don't give your name; they suspect us too much.'

Marthe Michu raised her face, and looked up at her husband.

'Michu, are you doing this for them?' she asked.

'Well, and if I am?' asked he, knitting his brows. He took her question for a reproach.

'You do not understand,' she said; and suddenly she fell on her knees before him and took his big hand in hers, and kissed it and covered it with tears.

'Make haste!' he said; 'you can cry afterwards;' and for a moment he held her tightly in his arms.

When the sound of his wife's footsteps had died away, there were tears in the eyes of this man of iron. He had distrusted Marthe on account of her father's opinions; he had kept the secrets of his life from her; and now the beauty of his wife's simple nature had been suddenly revealed to him, just as the greatness of his own character had dawned upon her. Marthe passed from the uttermost depths of humiliation — from the woman's feeling that she is degraded by the baseness of the man whose name she bears — to a rapture of glory; passed suddenly and without transition. Would it have been wonderful if her strength had failed her? The sharpest fear had preyed upon her mind on the way from the lodge to Cinq-Cygne; she had 'walked through blood,' as she told her husband afterwards; and now in a moment she felt herself caught up to heaven among the angels. And he, who felt that he was not appreciated, who took his wife's melancholy and drooping attitude for want of affection, who had lived out of the house so as to leave her to herself, and centred all his affection upon their child — he understood in a moment all that her tears meant, and knew that she cursed the part that her fair face and her father's will had forced her to play. Out of the midst of the storm the brightest flame of joy had leapt out for them like a lightning-flash. A lightning-flash indeed! Each of them thought of those ten years of misunderstanding and took the whole blame of them. Michu stood motionless, lost in deep musings, resting one arm on his gun and his chin on his arm. Such a moment atoned for all the pain of the most painful past.

The same thoughts were working in Marthe's mind, and her heart was heavy at the thought of the danger the Simeuses were running; she understood the whole position, even the faces of the two men from Paris, but she could not explain the rifles to herself. She fled like a fawn till she reached

the roadway, and was startled by the footsteps of a man behind her. She cried out; it was Michu's big hand that stopped her mouth.

'Looking out from the top of the knoll, I saw the gleam of the silver rims of gendarmes' caps,' he said. 'They are some way off. Go round through the gap in the fosse between Mademoiselle's tower and the stables; the dog will not bark at you; come up the garden and call to the Countess through the window; tell them to saddle Mademoiselle's horse and to bring the animal through the gap. I shall be there. But first I am going to find out what these Parisians mean to do, and how to escape them.'

The danger was coming down upon them like an avalanche; the necessity of preparing for it gave Marthe wings.

The Frankish name, common to the Cinq-Cygnes and the Chargebœufs, was Duineff. The younger branch of the Chargebœufs took the name in consequence of a defence of the castle once made by five daughters of the house in the absence of their father. No one expected such conduct of the sisters, all of them famous for their white fairness. One of the early counts of Champagne gave them the beautiful name to preserve the memory of the deed so long as the family should live. Since this extraordinary feat of arms the daughters of the house carried their heads high, but perhaps not all of them were white as the Swans. Laurence, the last of her race, was an exception to the Salic law; she inherited the name, the fief, and the armorial bearings; for the King of France confirmed the charter granted by the Count of Champagne, in virtue of which the Cinq-Cygnes' lands and titles may be handed down from mother to son. So Laurence was Countess of Cinq-Cygne. Her husband must take her name and the arms of her house and their motto, *Mourir en chantant*, the heroic answer made by the eldest of the five sisters when summoned to surrender, —'they would *die singing*.' Laurence was a worthy descend-

ant of those fair heroines; her whiteness seemed like a challenge to fate. The least outline of the blue veins could be seen beneath the delicate close tissue of skin; and hair of the prettiest shade of gold looked marvellously fair with eyes of the darkest blue. Everything about Laurence was tiny and delicate. But in spite of her slender shape and her milk-white skin, the soul that dwelt in her fragile body was tempered like that of a man of the loftiest character; no one, not even an observer, would have guessed this at sight of her gentle expression, her aquiline nose, and a vague suggestion of a sheep's head about her profile. Her exceeding gentleness, high-bred though it was, seemed almost to amount to lamb-like stupidity.

'I look like a dreaming sheep,' she sometimes said of herself, with a smile.

Laurence, who said so little, appeared to be not so much dreamy as torpid. In a grave crisis, the Judith dormant in her nature was revealed at once and grew sublime, and crises unfortunately had not been wanting.

At the age of thirteen, after the events which you already know, Laurence found herself an orphan, in a house in Troyes, opposite a heap of ruins which, but the day before, had been the Hôtel Cinq-Cygne—one of the most curious examples of sixteenth century architecture. M. d'Hauteserre, a relative, became her guardian, and carried off the heiress to the country, without loss of time. The Abbé d'Hauteserre, his brother, was shot down as he was escaping across the square, in peasant's dress; and this had frightened the worthy gentleman; he was in no position to defend his ward's interests. He had two sons in the army with the Princes; and every day of his life, at the slightest sound, he fancied that the Arcis authorities had come to arrest him. The old man bent before the stormy blast, and Laurence, proud of having stood a siege, proud, too, of the white fairness traditional in her house, looked down contemptuously upon his prudent cowardice.

She only thought of adding lustre to her name. So she had the audacity to hang Charlotte Corday's portrait on the wall of her poverty-stricken sitting-room, and to crown the frame with a little wreath of oak leaves. She corresponded with the twins by messenger; the law punished the offence with death, but she set the law at naught; and the messenger brought answers back at the risk of his life.

Since those tragic days at Troyes, Laurence only lived for the Royalist cause. She had formed pretty sound conclusions as to Madame and Monsieur d'Hauteserre; she saw that they were good but feeble folk; the laws of her sphere did not apply to them. Laurence had too much sense, she was too genuinely indulgent to bear malice against the couple for being what they were; she was kind, amiable, affectionate with them, but she never gave any of her secrets into their keeping. And nothing so shuts up the soul as a life of dissimulation in the family circle. When Laurence came of age, she left the old gentleman to manage her property as before. If her favourite mare was well groomed, her maid, Catherine, dressed to her taste, and her boy-servant, Gothard, properly turned out, she cared little about anything else. She turned her thoughts to so lofty an end that she could not descend to occupations which would, no doubt, have been pleasant to her in different times. Laurence cared little for dress, and besides, her cousins were not there. She wore a bottle-green riding-habit, or a walking dress of some cheap material, with a sleeveless bodice fastened with loops of twisted braid; and a loose silk wrapper in the house.

Gothard, her little squire, a quick-witted, mettled lad of fifteen, was her escort, for she was almost always out of doors. She shot over the whole Gondreville estate without any opposition from the tenants or Michu. She sat her horse to admiration, and in sport her skill bordered on the miraculous. The people in the country-side always called her 'Mademoiselle' even during the Revolution.

Anybody who has read that great romance, *Rob Roy*, must remember Diana Vernon, for Scott in his conception of her character made one of his very rare departures from his ordinary uninteresting feminine types. That recollection may enable the reader to understand Laurence, if he endows the Scottish huntress with the repressed enthusiasm of a Charlotte Corday, and takes away the amiable liveliness that made Diana so charming.

Laurence had seen her mother die; she had seen the Abbé d'Hauteserre shot down, and the Marquis and Marquise de Simeuse had perished on the scaffold. Her only brother had died of his wounds, her cousins serving in the army of Condé might fall at any moment, and, finally, she had seen the lands of the Simeuses and the Cinq-Cygnes swallowed down, nominally by the Republic, while the Republic had not benefited thereby. Laurence's gravity, degenerating, to all appearance, into stupor, should be conceivable enough.

M. d'Hauteserre, at all events, proved himself a most upright and intelligent guardian. Under his administration Cinq-Cygne looked like a farm-house. The old gentleman was as little as possible like a valiant knight-at-arms, and very much more like an improving landlord. He had turned a couple of hundred acres or so of park and gardens to good account; grew all that was wanted for the stables and the servants, and bought no firewood. Thanks to the strictest economy, the young Countess recovered a sufficient fortune by the time she came of age. Her surplus income was invested in the Funds. In 1798 the heiress derived an income of twenty thousand francs from government securities, on which, truth to tell, the interest was overdue, and twelve hundred francs from Cinq-Cygne, for the rent had been notably raised when the lease was renewed.

Monsieur and Madame d'Hauteserre had gone to live in the country on an annuity of three thousand francs in the Tontine Lafarge. They could not afford to live anywhere

else on the scanty remains of their fortune, so they lived on at Cinq-Cygne, and Laurence's first act on coming of age had been to give them possession of one wing of the house for their lifetime. The d'Hauteserres were as penurious for their ward as they were for themselves. Every year they put by a thousand crowns for their two sons. The heiress lived on poor fare. The total annual expenditure of Cinq-Cygne did not exceed five thousand francs. But Laurence never went into details, and felt quite satisfied with everything. And her guardian and his wife unconsciously fell under the influence of a character which made itself felt even in the smallest trifles, and ended by admiring the girl whom they had known as a child. A thing that happens seldom enough. But in Laurence's manner, in her guttural voice, in her imperious glance, there was that indescribable something, that inexplicable power which never fails to inspire awe; even when it is only the appearance of power; for in a fool vacuity is very easily mistaken for depth, as depth is beyond the comprehension of the ordinary mind. For which reasons many people admire anything that they do not understand.

Monsieur and Madame d'Hauteserre were impressed by the young Countess's habit of silence and her untamed ways; they were always expecting something great of her. And aristocrat though she was, Laurence had won great respect from the peasants, for her discriminating kindness to them, and the fact that she was not to be deceived. Her name, her sex, her misfortunes, and her unusual life all combined to give her an ascendancy over the people in the valley. Sometimes she set out, taking Gothard with her, and was absent all day or even for two days together; yet neither Monsieur nor Madame d'Hauteserre asked her why she had gone away. Laurence (it must be borne in mind) had nothing singular about her. The masculine nature was hidden beneath the most feminine and apparently delicate form. She had an extremely tender heart, but there

was virile resolution and stoical fortitude in her head. Her clear-sighted eyes had not learned to shed tears. And no one could have imagined of that slender white wrist, with its faint tracery of blue veins, that it could outweary the arm of the most seasoned horseman; or that her hand, so soft and flexible as it was, could manage a pistol or a fowling-piece with the vigour of a practised sportsman. Out of doors and on horseback Laurence's dress differed in no way from that of other women; she wore a black handkerchief knotted about her white throat, a coquettish little beaver hat and a green veil, so that her complexion, delicate though it was, had never suffered from her long rides in the open air.

Under the Directory and the Consulate, Laurence might do as she pleased and no one gave her a thought. But when the Government became more settled, the newly constituted authorities, the Prefect of the Aube, Malin's friends, and Malin himself, all tried to discredit her.

Laurence's whole mind was engrossed by schemes for overturning Bonaparte. Bonaparte's ambition and triumph had wrought a kind of frenzy in her, but it was a frenzy of a cool and calculating kind.

In the depths of her valley, in the heart of the forest, her eyes were always fixed upon her purpose with a dreadful fixity of gaze; she, the unknown, obscure enemy of the man who stood in the full light of glory, thought sometimes of slaying him in the grounds of Malmaison or St. Cloud. This purpose of hers would be in itself a sufficient explanation of her out-door life and habits; but after the Peace of Amiens she had been initiated into a conspiracy, a plot set on foot by men who thought to turn the 18th Brumaire against the First Consul. Since that time Laurence had brought her whole strength and the whole force of hate in her to bear upon a vast and well-contrived scheme for striking down Bonaparte. This was to be operated from without by the mighty coalition of Russia, Prussia, and

Austria, which as Emperor he defeated at Austerlitz; and from within by another coalition of men belonging to the most hostile parties now united by a common hate. Many of these, like Laurence, meditated the death of the First Consul, and were not afraid of the word assassination.

At this moment, therefore, a girl, so fragile in appearance, so strong for those who really knew her, was a faithful and sure guide for the nobles who came to and fro between France and Germany to take part in this attack. Fouché was using this co-operation of *émigrés* beyond the Rhine as the basis of his scheme for entangling the Duc d'Enghien in the plot; and the presence of that Prince in the territory of Baden, so close to Strasbourg and the frontier, afterwards gave weight to the suspicion. The great question, whether the Prince really had cognisance of the plot, and intended to enter France in case of success, is one of the secrets on which the Bourbon Princes have chosen to keep absolute silence. Gradually, as the story of the time becomes ancient history, it will strike the impartial historian that it was imprudent, to say the least of it, in the Prince, to come so near the frontier at a time when a vast conspiracy was just about to break out, especially as the fact was certainly known to the whole royal family.

In every least thing involving the conspiracy, Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne displayed the same prudence which Malin showed when he brought Grévin into the open air for his interview. She received emissaries, and conferred with them on the outskirts of the Forest of Nodesme, or at a place between Sézanne and Brienne, beyond the valley of Cinq-Cygne. She often rode between thirty and forty miles at a stretch with Gothard, and came back to Cinq-Cygne without the slightest trace of weariness or preoccupation on her fresh face. When Gothard was nine years old, she had read in his eyes the ingenuous admiration that children feel for anything extraordinary. She took the little cowherd for her squire, and taught him to rub down a horse

as carefully and thoroughly as any English groom. Seeing the boy's willingness, intelligence, and disinterestedness, she made trial of his devotion, and found not only quick-wittedness but nobleness of nature in him. He had no thought of reward. She set herself to cultivate a nature so young as yet. She was kind to him, as a great lady is kind; attaching him to herself, by attaching herself to him; polishing a half-wild character, while leaving it all its sap and simplicity. And then, when she had sufficiently proved the almost dog-like faithfulness that she had nurtured, Gothard became her ingenious and ingenuous confederate. Nobody could suspect the little peasant boy; he went several times from Cinq-Cygne to Nancy, and nobody knew that he had been from home.

Gothard practised every shift and stratagem known to spies. The excessive suspicion inculcated by his mistress was by no means foreign to his nature. With a woman's wit, a child's innocence, and the continual mental alertness of a conspirator, he hid these remarkable qualities under a countryman's torpor and unfathomable ignorance. The little man, to all appearance, was a clumsy, harmless rustic; but put him at his work, he was agile as a fish and slippery as an eel. Like a dog, he could understand a glance, and read thought by instinct. With his round, red, good-natured, homely face, his sleepy, brown eyes, his hair cut in the peasant fashion, his childish dress, and his very slow growth, he still looked like a little boy of ten.

MM. d'Hauteserre and Simeuse, with several other *émigrés*, had come by way of Alsace and Lorraine into Champagne, protected by their cousin Laurence, who had watched over them all the way from Strasbourg to Bar-sur-Aube. Another and no less adventurous band of conspirators had landed meanwhile under the cliffs of Normandy. The d'Hauteserres and Simeuses, disguised as labourers, had come on foot from forest to forest, guided from place to place by helpers chosen by Laurence herself. During the

past three months she had found out the most devoted partisans of the Bourbons among those least liable to suspicion. The *émigrés* slept all day and marched at night. Each one had brought two devoted soldiers; one of these was sent on ahead, and another left behind to cover the retreat in case of disaster. Thanks to these military dispositions, the dear detachment had reached the Forest of Nodesme, their trysting-place, in safety. Another band of twenty-seven gentlemen came at the same time by way of Switzerland and Burgundy, taking similar precautions. Altogether M. de Rivière counted upon five hundred men, one hundred of them being young nobles, the officers of the devoted band.

MM. de Polignac and Rivière, whose behaviour as leaders was extremely remarkable, kept the number of their accomplices a profound secret; their names were never known. It may however be said to-day, after the revelations that were made during the Restoration, that Bonaparte no more suspected the full extent of the risk that he ran in those days, than England imagined the peril with which she was threatened by the camp at Boulogne; and yet, at no time was the police system more intelligently and efficiently worked. At the time of the opening of this story, one of the poltroons that will always be found in every conspiracy which is not confined to a little band of strong spirits, a single conspirator when brought face to face with death gave information, luckily insufficient as to the extent, but precise enough as to the objects of the attempt. For which reason the police, as Malin had told Grévin, had left the conspirators at liberty while they watched them closely so as to follow up all the ramifications of the plot. Still the hand of the Government had been in some sort forced by Georges Cadoudal, an energetic leader who took counsel with no one but himself, and lay in hiding in Paris with twenty-five Chouans, ready to attack the First Consul.

Love and hate were blended in Laurence's thoughts. To make an end of Bonaparte, and to bring back the Bourbons, — what was this but to regain Gondreville and to make her cousins' fortune? Those two opposite feelings are sufficient to bring out all the powers of the soul and all the forces of life, especially at the age of three and twenty. Never before had Laurence looked so beautiful to the folk at Cinq-Cygne as she had done of late during the past two months. There was a red colour in her cheeks; hope, at some moments, lent pride to her brows; and when the *Gazette* was read aloud of an evening, and they heard the First Consul's conservative policy therein set forth, she would lower her eyes lest any one should see her conviction that the fall of Bonaparte was at hand.

Nobody at the château suspected, therefore, that the Countess had seen her cousins on the previous night. Monsieur and Madame d'Hauteserre's two sons had slept in the Countess's own room, beneath the same roof with their father and mother; for Laurence, by way of precaution, admitted the two d'Hauteserres between one and two in the morning, and went to join her cousins the Simeuses in the forest, where they lay hidden in a deserted woodman's hut. She felt so sure of meeting them again, that she showed not the slightest sign of joy, nor was there a trace of excitement or suspense in her manner; in short, she had contrived to efface the expression of the pleasure she had felt. She was quite impassive. Catherine, her foster-mother's pretty daughter, and Gothard were both in the secret, and followed their mistress's example. Catherine was nineteen years old. A girl of nineteen, like Gothard, is fanatical in her devotion; she will not utter a word with the knife at her throat. And as for Gothard, the rack would not have drawn a syllable from him, after a breath of the scent that clung about the Countess's dress and hair.

While Marthe was gliding along like a shadow towards

the gap of which Michu spoke when he warned her that danger was nigh at hand, the scene in the drawing-room at Cinq-Cygne was as peaceful as could be. The family were so far from suspecting that a storm was about to burst, that any one who had known their true position must have felt sorry for them. A fire was blazing on the great hearth beneath the pier-glass on the wall where the shepherdesses in paniers were dancing — such a fire as you only see in châteaux in a wooded country. And, by the fireside, in a great, square, gilded chair, covered with handsome silk damask, lay the young Countess, stretched at full length, as it were, in complete exhaustion. She had only come in at six o'clock, after riding as far as the Brie district, acting as scout till she saw her four nobles safely to the lair whence they were to make the final stage to Paris. Monsieur and Madame d'Hauteserre had almost finished dinner when she came in; so, famished as she was, she sat down to table in her mud-stained riding-habit and thick shoes, and when dinner was over she felt too tired to change her dress after all the day's fatigue. Her beautiful head, with its thick, bright curls, was resting on the back of her large, low chair; her feet were stretched out on a footstool, the splashes of mud on her shoes and habit were slowly drying in the warmth of the fire. Her hat and gloves and riding-whip lay on the console table, where she had thrown them down.

Now again she glanced up at the Boule clock between the two flowery branched candlesticks on the mantle shelf, and wondered whether the conspirators were in bed by this time; then again she looked at the card-table drawn up to the fire; Monsieur and Madame d'Hauteserre were playing their game of boston with the curé of Cinq-Cygne and his sister.

Even if these personages had not been embedded in the course of the story their portraits would still have this merit, — they give an idea of one of the positions taken up

by the aristocracy after their defeat in 1793. From this point of view, a description of the inmates of the drawing-room at Cinq-Cygne, may be regarded as history in dressing-gown and slippers.

M. d'Hauteserre, a tall, spare, sanguine man, aged fifty-two, enjoyed robust health, and might have seemed capable of vigorous action if it had not been for the excessively simple expression of his big, china-blue eyes. An altogether disproportionate space between the mouth and nose in a countenance terminated by a long, peaked chin, gave to that gentleman an appearance of meekness perfectly in accordance with his character, and every little detail of his appearance bore out this impression. His grey hair, for instance, felted by the pressure of the hat that he wore almost the whole day long, looked something like a skullcap, completing the outline of a pear-shaped head. His forehead, deeply wrinkled by an out-of-door life and continual anxiety, was vacant and expressionless. A hooked nose lent a certain amount of contrast to his face; but the only signs of force of character about him were to be found in the bushy eyebrows, still black as ever, and a high-coloured complexion. Nor was this a misleading trait; the country gentleman, simple and mild-tempered though he was, held to his monarchical and religious creeds, and nothing would have induced him to change either the one or the other. If he had been arrested, the good, easy man would have made no resistance; he would not have fired on the representatives of the authority; he would have trotted off quite meekly to the scaffold. He would have 'emigrated' if his whole income had not consisted of an annuity of three thousand livres; but as it was, he submitted to the government *de facto*, without faltering in his attachment to the royal family. He wished to see the Bourbons once more upon the throne, but he would have refused to compromise himself by taking part in any attempt to bring them back again.

M. d'Hauteserre belonged to that section of the Royalist party which could never forget that it had been beaten and robbed, and thenceforth remained mute, frugal, rancorous, and inert. Incapable alike of forswearing their principles or of making any sacrifice for them; perfectly ready to hail triumphant royalty; friends of priests and religion, they made up their minds to endure all the buffets of adverse fortune. These folk cannot be said to hold opinions, they are merely obdurate. Action is the *sine qua non* of a political party. M. d'Hauteserre, loyal but unintelligent, close-fisted as a peasant, yet lofty in his manners; bold in his wishes, yet discreet in words and actions, turning everything to account and quite ready to act as mayor of Cinq-Cygne, was an admirable specimen of his class. He was one of those honourable country gentlemen upon whose foreheads God has legibly written the word 'mite'; these stayed in their manor-houses while the storms of the Revolution passed over their heads, emerging under the Restoration rich with hoarded savings and proud of their non-committal attachment, only to return to their estates in 1830.

M. d'Hauteserre's costume was the expressive husk of his character; his dress portrayed the man and the time in which he lived. He wore the nut-brown greatcoat, with a narrow collar, brought into fashion by the last Duke of Orléans after his return from England; a kind of compromise between the hideous popular costume and the graceful overcoats worn by the aristocracy. A velvet waistcoat with flowered stripes, something after the pattern familiarised by Robespierre and Saint Just, was cut low enough to display the beginnings of a little plaited shirt frill. He had not discarded the old-fashioned small-clothes, but they were made of coarse blue cloth fastened with steel buckles. Black silk stockings clung to the outlines of a pair of stag's legs, and his heavy shoes were kept in place by black cloth gaiters. His throat was enveloped by

the multitudinous folds of a muslin stock, fastened by a gold buckle. The good man by no means aimed at expressing his political eclecticism in a costume in which peasant, revolutionary, and aristocrat were nicely blended; he had quite innocently bowed to circumstances.

Madame d'Hauteserre was a woman of forty, aged by emotion; with a faded face that seemed always to be posed for a portrait; a lace cap adorned with upstanding satin bows contributed not a little to the solemnity of her air. She still wore powder in spite of her dress of a later period; a white kerchief, and a puce-coloured silk gown with tight sleeves and a very full skirt, the last sober costume worn by Marie Antoinette. Her nose was pinched, her chin pointed, her face almost triangular, but she continued to put on the "suspicion" of rouge which lent brightness to the eyes that had shed so many tears. And she took snuff, omitting none of those little dainty precautions which the fine ladies of a previous age carried to the point of affectation; a host of small observances almost amounting to a rite, and all explained by a few words — Madame d'Hauteserre had pretty hands.

A Minorite abbé, Goujet by name, a friend of the late Abbé d'Hauteserre and tutor of the two Simeuses, had taken the curé of Cinq-Cygne for his retreat for the past two years, out of friendship for the d'Hauteserres and the young Countess. Mademoiselle Goujet, his sister, rich to the extent of seven hundred francs per annum, united her income to the curé's slender stipend, and kept house for her brother. Neither the church nor the parsonage had been sold because they were worth so little. So the Abbé Goujet lodged close by the château, for the parsonage garden lay on the other side of the park wall. Twice a week, he and his sister dined at the château, and every evening they came for a game of cards with the d'Hauteserres. Laurence did not know a single game.

The Abbé Goujet had a pleasant smile and a gentle,

winning voice. His hair was white; his face, too, was white as an old woman's; an intelligent forehead and a pair of very keen eyes redeemed his almost doll-like countenance from insipidity. A well-made man of average height, he continued to wear the Frenchman's black coat, silver buckles at his knees and on his shoes, black silk stockings, and a black waistcoat with white bands, which gave him a certain grand air, while it took nothing from his dignity.

The Abbé (he became Bishop of Troyes after the Restoration) had gained a considerable insight into the characters of young people in the course of his former life; he had divined Laurence's greatness; he fully appreciated her, and from the first treated the young girl with a respectful deference which contributed not a little to give her an independent position at Cinq-Cygne; the austere old lady and the good gentleman gave way to Laurence, instead of requiring obedience of her in the usual fashion. For the past six months the Abbé Goujet had been watching Laurence with that genius of observation peculiar to priests, the most perspicacious of all human beings. He did not know that this girl of three and twenty was thinking of dethroning Bonaparte, while her fragile fingers were twisting the loops of braid on her riding-habit; still he thought that some great purpose was fermenting in her mind.

Mademoiselle Goujet was a spinster whose portrait can be given in two words which will call up her image before the least imaginative mind. She was a woman of the big, gawky type. She knew she was ugly. She was the first to laugh at her ugliness, showing as she laughed a set of long teeth as yellow as her complexion and her bony hands. Mademoiselle Goujet was unfailingly cheerful and kind. She wore the well-known old-fashioned jacket, very full skirts, a pocket always full of keys, a cap trimmed with ribbons, and a false front. She looked like a woman of forty long before she reached that age, but she made up for it, as she said, by looking very much the same for twenty

years together. Mademoiselle Goujet had a great veneration for the noblesse; she knew how to preserve her own dignity while rendering to noble birth its dues of respect and homage.

Their society was very welcome to Madame d'Hauteserre; unlike her husband, she had no out-of-door occupations, nor had she, like Laurence, a strong hatred to brace her to the endurance of a lonely existence. Life had grown in some sort bearable during the past six years. The Catholic Church had been re-established; there were religious duties to be fulfilled (and these vibrate through life in the country as they never do anywhere else). The First Consul's conservative action reassured Monsieur and Madame d'Hauteserre; latterly they had been able to correspond with their sons, they had news of them in return. They need no longer tremble for their children, and begged them to make application to be erased from the List of *émigrés* and to come back to France. The Treasury had cleared off arrears and punctually continued to pay dividends quarter by quarter, so that the d'Hauteserres had rather more than their annuity of eight thousand francs. Old M. d'Hauteserre applauded his own sagacity and foresight. His savings for his ward, together with his own (some twenty thousand francs) had been invested in the Funds before the 18th Brumaire sent them up, as all the world knows, from twelve to eighteen francs.

For years Cinq-Cygne remained bare, empty, and desolate, M. d'Hauteserre having prudently determined to make no changes so long as the Revolutionary commotion lasted; but after the Peace of Amiens he went to Troyes to buy back some relics of the sack of the two mansions, from second-hand furniture dealers. Thanks to his pains, the drawing-room had been furnished. The six windows were adorned with handsome curtains of white silk damask with a green flower-pattern, which once hung in the Hôtel Simeuse. The whole great room had been newly wain-

scoted with panels, each one framed in strips of beading, with masks by way of ornament at the corners, and the whole was painted in two shades of grey. Various subjects, in the grey cameo style in fashion under Louis XV, covered the frieze panels above the four doors; and the good man had found gilded console tables at Troyes, as well as a suite of furniture in green silk damask, a crystal chandelier, an inlaid card-table, and everything that might serve to restore Cinq-Cygne.

All the furniture of the château had been plundered in 1792, for the sack of the town houses was followed by a sack in the valley. Every time that M. d'Hauteserre went to Troyes, he came back again with some few relics of ancient splendour; sometimes it was a handsome carpet, like the one which covered the drawing-room floor; sometimes it was a piece of plate, or old Dresden or Sèvres china. Six months ago he had ventured to dig up the Cinq-Cygne silver plate, which the cook had buried in a little house belonging to him, at the end of one of the straggling suburbs of Troyes.

This faithful servant, Durieu by name, and his wife, had always followed their young mistress's fortunes. Durieu was the man-of-all-work at the château, and his wife was housekeeper. Catherine's sister was kitchen-maid, and, under Durieu's training, was in a fair way to be an excellent cook. An old gardener and his wife, their son, a day labourer, and their daughter, the dairymaid, completed the staff of servants at the château. Six months since, La Durieu had secretly made a livery in the Cinq-Cygne colours for Gothard and the gardener's son, a piece of imprudence for which the old gentleman scolded her soundly; but she could not refuse herself the pleasure of having dinner served almost as it used to be in old times at the feast of St. Laurence, Mademoiselle's patron saint. As for Monsieur and Madame d'Hauteserre and the Durieus, this slow, difficult progress of restoration was

the joy of their lives, though Laurence used to smile at what she called childishness. But old M. d'Hauteserre took no less thought for substantial matters; he repaired buildings, reconstructed walls, put in a tree wherever there was a chance for it to grow, and made every inch of ground yield a return. Wherefore the valley of Cinq-Cygne regarded him as an oracle in matters pertaining to agriculture. He contrived to recover a hundred acres of land contested but not sold, and confounded with the common land by the commune. These he turned into artificial pastures for the cattle of the château, planting the meadows round with poplar trees, which had sprung up to admiration in six years. He purposed to buy back more land by and by, and to turn the buildings at the château to account on a second farm which he meant to manage himself.

So for the last two years, life had grown almost happy at Cinq-Cygne. M. d'Hauteserre was up and out at sunrise, looking after his men, for he was an employer of labour all through those times. He came in to breakfast, and afterwards made his rounds like any keeper on a farmer's nag; then returning to dinner, he finished off his day with boston. Every one at the château had his or her occupations; life in a convent was not more regular. Laurence was the only person who brought disturbance into it by her sudden journeys and absences from home; her 'flights,' as Madame d'Hauteserre called them. Nevertheless there were two parties at Cinq-Cygne, and causes of dissension.

In the first place, Durieu and his wife were jealous of Gothard and Catherine who lived in greater intimacy with their young mistress, the idol of the household. Then the d'Hauteserres, supported by Mademoiselle Goujet and her brother, were anxious that their sons and the Simeuses likewise should return to share the happiness of this peaceful life, instead of living in discomfort abroad. Laurence denounced this compromise as infamous. She represented

pure, implacable, militant Royalism. The four old people had no wish to see prospects of a happy existence any longer in jeopardy, nor to risk the loss of the little nook of land won back from the torrent deluge of the Revolution. They tried to convert Laurence to their truly prudent doctrines, for they saw that her influence counted for a good deal in the opposition made by the *émigrés* to all proposals for a return to France. The guardians, poor things, were frightened by their ward's superb disdain. They were afraid that she was meditating some rash deed, and they were not mistaken.

This difference of opinion in the family had flashed suddenly out after the explosion of the infernal machine in the Rue Saint Nicaise, the first Royalist attempt upon the life of the conqueror of Marengo, after his refusal to treat with the House of Bourbon. The d'Hauteserres thought it a fortunate thing that Bonaparte had escaped the danger, quite believing that Republicans were the authors of the outrage. Laurence shed angry tears because the First Consul was saved. Her despair got the better of her habit of dissimulation; she accused God of betraying the son of St. Louis.

'Ah!' she cried, '*I* would have succeeded!' Then seeing the unutterable amazement in their faces, she turned to the Abbé Goujet. 'Have we not a right to make use of all possible means against a usurper?'

'The Church has been impugned and severely blamed by the *philosophes*, my child, because in former times she held that it was justifiable to turn a usurper's weapons against himself; and in these days the Church owes so much to M. le Premier Consul that she cannot but protect and guarantee him from the consequences of a maxim, due moreover to the Jesuits.'

'So the Church forsakes us!' she had answered, with a dark expression in her face.

From that day, whenever the four old people began to

talk of submission to Providence, the young Countess left the room. And for some time past the curé (more adroit than the guardian) had ceased to discuss principles, and dwelt on the material advantages offered by the consular government; not so much with a view to converting the Countess, as to try to gain light upon her projects by watching the expression of her eyes at unguarded moments.

Laurence rode abroad more than ever. Gothard's frequent absences from home, Laurence's preoccupation, which in these last days rose to the surface and appeared on her face, a whole host of little things in short, which could not escape observation in the quiet, peaceful life at Cinq-Cygne, and certainly did not escape the anxious eyes of the d'Hauteserres, the Abbé Goujet, and the Durieus, — all this awakened the fears of Royalist resignation. But nothing seemed to come of it; the most perfect serenity prevailed in the political atmosphere for some days, and the little household in the château settled down into peace as before. Everybody thought that the Countess's passion for sport accounted for her wanderings.

It is not difficult to imagine the deep silence that prevailed in the park and the courtyards and all about the château of Cinq-Cygne at nine o'clock at night. Everything and every one was so harmoniously coloured, a deep peace brooded over the household, plenty had returned, and the good and prudent country gentleman had hopes of converting his ward to his theories of submission by a continuance of happy results. They were sitting over their boston, which game of cards was first invented in honour of the revolted American colonies; all the terms used in it recalled the struggle encouraged by Louis XVI, and the idea of independence became familiar to Frenchmen in this frivolous manner. But while the players scored their 'independences' and 'misères,' they were watching Laurence.

Drowsiness soon overcame her; she fell asleep with an

ironical smile hovering on her lips. Her last conscious thought had been of the party seated so quietly at the card-table, when two words from her, telling the d'Hauteserres that their son had spent the previous night beneath their roof, would have struck the deepest consternation into all four of them. What girl of three and twenty would not have felt, as Laurence felt, proud to shape fate, and shared the faint stirrings of compassion which she felt for those so far beneath her?

'She is asleep,' said the abbé. 'I have never seen her look so tired.'

'Durieu said that the mare was almost foundered,' remarked Madame d'Hauteserre; 'her gun had not been used. The cartridge chamber was clean; so she has not been out shooting.'

'Fiddle-de-dee!' returned the curé, 'that amounts to nothing.'

'Pooh!' cried Mademoiselle Goujet, 'when I was three and twenty and saw that I was doomed to be an old maid, I ran about and tired myself very much more. I can understand that the Countess may go about the country without any notion of shooting game. She has not set eyes on her cousins for twelve years; she is fond of them, very good; in her place, now, if I were young and pretty, I should go straight into Germany. And perhaps she feels attracted to the frontier, poor, dear child.'

'Mademoiselle Goujet, you are improper,' said the curé smiling.

'Why, you are fidgeting over the goings and comings of a girl of three and twenty, and I explain it,' said she.

'Her cousins will come back. She will be rich, and she will settle down in the end,' old d'Hauteserre added.

'God send she may!' cried old Madame d'Hauteserre, bringing out her gold snuff-box. (It had seen the light since Bonaparte became Consul for life.)

'There is news in the country-side,' continued old

d'Hauteserre, addressing the curé. 'Malin came down to Gondreville yesterday evening.'

'Malin?' exclaimed Laurence, awakened by the name, in spite of her profound slumber.

'Yes,' said the curé, 'but he is going back again to-night, and people are lost in conjecture over his sudden journey.'

'That man is the evil genius of our two houses,' said Laurence.

She had been dreaming about her cousins and the d'Hauteserres, and danger had threatened them in her dream. Her beautiful eyes grew wan as she stared before her and thought of the perils that they must encounter in Paris. She rose abruptly and went up to her room, the chamber of honour, with a dressing-room and an oratory situated in the tower nearest the forest.

Soon after Laurence left the drawing-room the dogs began to bark, somebody rang the bell at the gate, and Durieu came in consternation to announce, 'Here comes the mayor! This is something fresh!'

The mayor, one Goulard, had once been one of the late Marquis de Simeuse's huntsmen. He used to come occasionally to Cinq-Cygne, and the d'Hauteserres considered it politic to treat him with a deference which the man valued highly. He had married a wealthy tradeswoman from Troyes; his wife's property lay in the commune of Cinq-Cygne, and he himself had added to it by investing all his savings in the lands of a rich abbey. He and his wife lived like two rats in a cathedral, at the great Abbey of Val-des-Preux, about half a mile away, a great place almost as stately as Gondreville.

'Goulard, you have been a glutton!' Mademoiselle said laughing, when she first saw him at the château.

The mayor was warmly attached to the Revolution, and the Countess received him coldly; but he always felt bound by the ties of respect to the Cinq-Cygnes and the Simeuses, and for this reason he shut his eyes to much that went on

there. He was blind to the portraits of Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette, the Children of France, Monsieur the Comte d'Artois, de Cazalès, and Charlotte Corday, which adorned the panels of the drawing-room; and deaf to wishes for the downfall of the Republic, or to scoffing at the expense of the Five Directors and other political arrangements of those days; and this he called 'shutting his eyes.' Like many other upstarts, he recovered his belief in the old families as soon as his fortune was made; he wanted to connect himself with them, and this position of affairs had just been exploited by the two personages whom Michu had so promptly recognised as spies. Corentin and Peyrade had made a survey of the district before they went to Gondreville.

The worthy described as the depositary of the best traditions of the old police, and Corentin, phœnix of spies, were in fact employed on a secret mission. Malin was not mistaken when he assigned a double part to that pair of artists in tragic farce. They were arms under the direction of a head which should perhaps be revealed before they are seen at their work.

When Bonaparte became First Consul, Fouché was the director-general of police. The Revolution had frankly and with reason made a special department of this branch of the service, but when Bonaparte came back after Marengo, he created a prefecture of police, installed Dubois as prefect, summoned Fouché to the Council of State, and nominated Cochon (of the Convention, afterwards Comte de Lapparent) as Fouché's successor. Fouché regarded the office of Minister of Police as the most important of all in a government which took large views, and followed a definite political programme; he therefore took the change as a disgrace, or, at any rate, as a sign of distrust. Then came the affair of the infernal machine and the plot which forms the subject of this history; and Napoleon recognised the fact that no man could be compared with Fouché

in fitness for his office. Yet, later, the Emperor took alarm at the talents which Fouché displayed in his absence. After the Walcheren affair he made the Duke of Rovigo his Minister of Police, and appointed the Duke of Otranto to be Governor of the Illyrian Provinces, which practically meant that he sent him into exile.

Fouché's extraordinary genius, which struck a kind of dread into Napoleon, did not become apparent all at once. An obscure member of the Convention, one of the most remarkable and misjudged men of the time, he was formed in tempests. Under the Directory he reached an elevation whence profound natures can see the future by judging the past, and then quite suddenly, as a mediocre actor sometimes attains excellence with a flash of inspiration, he gave proofs of his skill during the rapid revolution of the 18th Brumaire. Slowly and silently this pale-faced creature — trained in monastic dissimulation, deep in the confidence of the Jacobin party, to which he belonged, and possessed of the secrets of the Royalists, to whom he went over at the last — had studied men and affairs and the interests at stake in the political arena. He divined Bonaparte's secret wishes and intentions, and gave him useful advice and valuable information. He had shown himself to be a man of resource, and useful to the government; and he was satisfied to do no more. He had no mind to make a complete revelation of himself; he meant to remain at the head of affairs; and Napoleon's uncertainty with regard to him gave him a free hand in politics. The Emperor's ingratitude, or, to be more accurate, his suspicion, after the Walcheren affair, throws a new light on the character of the man; unfortunately for himself he was no *grand seigneur*, and he modelled his conduct upon that of the Prince de Talleyrand.

At this particular moment, not one of his former or present colleagues suspected the extent of his genius, a purely administrative, essentially departmental genius, accurate in all forecasts, and sagacious beyond belief. Any impartial his-

torian must see, at this distance of time, that Napoleon's prodigious egoism was one of the many causes which brought about his downfall, a cruel expiation of his errors. In that suspicious sovereign, there was a certain jealousy of his new-born power, a jealousy which influenced all his actions at least as strongly as his private dislike of that group of able men (a valuable legacy left him by the Revolution) of whom he might have formed a cabinet to be the depositary of his thoughts. Others, beside Talleyrand and Fouché, aroused his suspicions. It is the misfortune of a usurper that he is bound to have two separate sets of enemies, those who gave him his crown, and those from whom he took it. Napoleon never wholly won sovereignty over the men who had been at first his superiors and afterwards his equals; nor, again, over sticklers for the rightful succession. Nobody felt that the oath of allegiance was binding.

Malin was a mediocrity; he was quite incapable of appreciating Fouché's dark genius; he did not distrust that quick comprehensive glance. So he singed himself like a moth in the candle flame. He went to Fouché to ask him in confidence to send some agents of police to Gondreville. He had hopes, he said, of throwing a light on the plot. Fouché was very careful not to startle his friend by putting any question to him, but he asked himself why Malin was going to Gondreville, and how it was that he did not communicate any information that he happened to have at once in Paris. The ex-oratorian, nurtured in dissimulation, and well aware that many members of the Convention were playing a double part, said to himself: —

'How comes it that Malin knows something, when we as yet know next to nothing?'

Naturally Fouché concluded that Malin was either implicated already or had designs of his own; but he was very careful to say nothing to the First Consul. He preferred not to ruin Malin, but to make a tool of him. This was Fouché's way. Most of the secrets that he discovered he

kept to himself; he husbanded his power over people, and his power was even greater than Bonaparte's. This duplicity was one of Napoleon's grievances against his Minister.

Fouché knew that Malin had gained his estate at Gondreville by rascality; he knew, too, that Malin was obliged to keep on the watch for the Simeuses. The Simeuses were serving in the Army of Condé, and Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne was their cousin. They might very likely be somewhere in the neighbourhood; possibly, also, they were involved in the plot; and, if this were so, the House of Condé, to which they were devoted, was certainly likewise involved. Altogether, M. de Talleyrand and Fouché held it important to gain light upon this very obscure corner of the conspiracy of 1803.

All these considerations Fouché saw with swift lucidity of comprehension. But the relation in which Malin and Talleyrand stood to one another obliged him to proceed with the utmost circumspection, and therefore he wished to have the most complete information as to the interior of the château of Gondreville. Corentin was wholly in Fouché's interest, just as M. de la Besnardière was attached to Talleyrand, Gentz to Metternich, Dundas to Pitt, Duroc to Napoleon, or Chavigny to Cardinal Richelieu. And Corentin was not merely Fouché's adviser, he was his familiar, his *âme damnée*, a Tristan in secret to a Louis XI on a small scale. It was therefore material that Fouché should leave him in the police department, so as to have an eye and a hand there. People said that the young fellow was related in some way to Fouché; that he was one of those connections which are never acknowledged; for Corentin's services were always lavishly rewarded. Corentin had made a friend of Peyrade, a pupil trained by the last of the lieutenants of police; still he had secrets even from Peyrade. Fouché's orders to Corentin had been to explore the château at Gondreville, to have the whole place

mapped out in his memory, and to discover every possible hiding-place.

'We may perhaps be obliged to go there again,' he had said, exactly as Napoleon told his lieutenants to make a careful survey of the field of Austerlitz, on which he expected to fall back.

It was Corentin's task, besides, to make a study of Malin's behaviour. He was to ascertain the man's influence in the district and to notice the kind of men in his employ. Fouché felt quite certain that the Simeuses were somewhere in the neighbourhood, and by playing the spy discreetly upon two officers in high favour with Condé, Peyrade and Corentin might gain invaluable light upon the ramifications of the plot beyond the Rhine. In any case, Corentin had money, authority, and men sufficient to surround Cinq-Cygne and to put the whole district between the Forest of Nodesme and Paris, under the surveillance of a spy system. Fouché's injunction, however, was to proceed with the greatest caution; they were not to make the domiciliary visit to Cinq-Cygne unless Malin himself gave them positive information. Finally, as a part of his instructions Fouché had given Corentin an account of the inexplicable personality of this Malin whom he had watched for three years. Corentin's thought was in his chief's mind at the same time.

'Malin knows about this conspiracy! . . . But who knows whether Fouché is not in it too?' he added within himself.

Corentin set out for Troyes before Malin started; came to an understanding with the commandant of gendarmerie; chose out the most intelligent of the men and a keen-witted captain for their leader. To this captain, Corentin gave orders to divide his men in four groups of a dozen, and to post them after nightfall at four different points in the valley of Cinq-Cygne. These groups, on picket duty, were to be placed sufficiently far apart, for fear of giving

the alarm, and gradually to close in till they formed a square about the château.

When Malin went out for his conference with Grévin, he gave Corentin an opportunity of fulfilling one part of his mission. And when the State Councillor came back from his interview in the park, he stated so positively that the Simeuses and the d'Hauteserres were actually in the neighbourhood, that Corentin and Peyrade despatched their captain on his errand. Very luckily for the gentlemen in hiding, the gendarmes went through the forest, by way of the avenue, while Michu was plying Violette the spy with drink.

Malin had begun by telling Peyrade and Corentin about the trap from which he had just escaped. The two men from Paris, thereupon, related the incident of the rifle. Grévin sent Violette down to the lodge to see what was going on, and Corentin asked the notary to take his friend to spend the night under his roof in the little town of Arcis, for greater security. So it happened that while Michu was galloping across the forest to Cinq-Cygne, Peyrade and Corentin started out from Gondreville in a shabby basket-chaise drawn by a post-horse, and the man who drove them was the constable of gendarmerie from Arcis, one of the smartest men in the force; they had taken him on the particular recommendation of the commandant at Troyes.

'The best way of getting hold of them is to give them warning,' Peyrade remarked to Corentin. 'Then when they are scared, and try to save their papers or to fly, we will drop down on them like a thunderbolt. When the ring of gendarmes closes in about the château, we shall have them in a net. We shall get them all in that way.'

'You might send the mayor to warn them,' suggested the constable. 'He is well disposed to them; he does not wish them harm. They will not suspect him.'

Goulard was just going off to bed when Corentin stopped the chaise in a little wood, and went alone to tell

him (in confidence) that in another minute or two a government agent would require him, the mayor, to give his assistance to surround Cinq-Cygne, and to seize MM. de Simeuse and d'Hauteserre at the château. If these gentlemen had disappeared, it must be ascertained whether they had spent the previous night there. Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne's papers were to be searched, and probably the whole household would be put under arrest.

'Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne has interest with powerful persons, no doubt,' continued Corentin, 'for my secret instructions are to give her warning, and to do all that I can to save her, without committing myself. Once on the spot, I cannot act on my own responsibility; I am not alone. So hurry off to the château.'

A visit from the mayor in the middle of the evening was the more surprising to the card-players because Goulard turned a perturbed countenance upon them.

'Where is the Countess?' he inquired.

'She has gone to bed,' replied Madame d'Hauteserre.

The mayor lent an incredulous ear to the sounds above.

'What is the matter with you to-day, Goulard?' added Madame d'Hauteserre.

Goulard looked around upon their faces; each one expressed that complete innocence which may survive to any age. He sank into the utmost depths of astonishment. At sight of the quiet, harmless game of boston interrupted by his entrance, the suspicions of the Paris police grew utterly inconceivable.

Laurence meanwhile, in her oratory, was kneeling in passionate prayer for the success of the plot! She prayed to God to give help and strength to Bonaparte's murderers! The fanatical zeal of a Harmodius, a Judith, a Jacques Clément, an Anckarstroem, a Charlotte Corday, a Limoëlan inspired a pure and noble maiden soul. Catherine was turning back the sheets, and Gothard was closing

the shutters; so that when Marthe Michu flung a pebble up at the window he saw her at once.

'Mademoiselle!' he called, at sight of the stranger, 'something has happened.'

'Hush!' whispered Marthe, 'come and speak to me.'

Gothard was down and out in the garden in less time than a bird takes to fly from the tree-top to the ground.

'The gendarmerie will be round the château in another minute. . . . Go and saddle Mademoiselle's horse; don't make any noise, and come round through the gap in the fosse between the stables and the tower.'

Laurence had followed Gothard, and stood a couple of paces away. Marthe quivered at sight of her.

'What is it?' Laurence asked, simply and without a sign of discomposure.

'The plot against the First Consul is discovered,' Marthe answered, lowering her voice for the Countess's ear. 'My husband is thinking how to save your cousins. He sent me to ask you to come to speak with him.'

Laurence drew back a step or two and looked full at Marthe.

'Who are you?' she asked.

'Marthe Michu.'

'I do not know what you want with me,' Laurence returned coolly.

'But you are sending them to their death! for the Simeuses' sake, come!' cried Marthe, falling on her knees and holding out her hands entreatingly. 'Are there any papers here, anything that can compromise you? My husband, up yonder in the forest, saw the rims of the gendarmes' caps and the barrels of their guns.'

Gothard had begun by scrambling into the loft. He saw the glitter of laced uniforms, and heard the sound of horse hoofs through the stillness. He dropped down into the stable and saddled his mistress's horse; Catherine, at a word from him, tied the animal's feet in linen bandages.

'Where must I go?' asked Laurence, for the unmistakable ring of truth in the words and the expression of Marthe's face had struck her forcibly.

'Through the gap,' said Marthe, hurrying her along. 'That noble man of mine is there. You shall learn what a Judas is worth.'

Catherine ran into the drawing-room, caught up her mistress's gloves, hat and veil and riding-whip, and went out again. Catherine's sudden appearance was such an eloquent commentary on the mayor's words that Madame d'Hauteserre and the Abbé Goujet, exchanging glances, read a horrible thought in each other's eyes. 'Good-bye to all our happy life! Laurence is plotting against the Government; her cousins and the two d'Hauteserres are lost, and it is her doing!'

'What do you mean?' asked Madame d'Hauteserre, turning to Goulard.

'Why, the château is surrounded; you are to receive a domiciliary visit. In short, if your sons are here in the house, help to save them and the Simeuses.'

'*My sons!*' cried Madame d'Hauteserre in bewilderment.

'We have seen nobody here,' began her husband.

'So much the better!' returned Goulard. 'But I am too much attached to the family of Cinq-Cygne and the Simeuses to bear to see any misfortune happen to them. Mind what I say — if you have any compromising papers ——'

'Papers?' repeated old M. d'Hauteserre.

'Yes; if there are any, burn them,' returned the mayor. 'I will go and keep these people in play.'

Goulard had a mind to hold with the Royalist hare and to run with the Republican hounds. He went out, and the dogs began to bark furiously.

'It is too late,' said the curé; 'here they are. But who is going to tell the Countess? Where is she?'

'Catherine did not come in for her hat and gloves and riding-whip to make relics of them,' remarked Mademoi-

selle Goujet. For some minutes Goulard tried to gain time by assuring the two police agents that the people in the château of Cinq-Cygne knew nothing whatever about the matter.

Peyrade laughed in his face.

'You don't know those folk,' he said, and with that the pair entered the house. At sight of their ominously bland countenances and the constable from Arcis and the gendarme appearing behind them, the four peaceable boston players felt the blood freeze in their veins. They stayed in their places, appalled by such a display of force. Half a score of gendarmes were stationed outside, for the sound of horses pawing the ground reached them across the lawn.

'Every one is here except Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne,' remarked Corentin.

'But she is asleep, no doubt, in her own room,' said M. d'Hauteserre.

'Ladies, come with me,' said Corentin. He sprang across the antechamber and up the staircase, Madame d'Hauteserre and Mademoiselle Goujet following him. Corentin turned to the older lady. 'Count upon me,' he whispered. 'I am one of your own side. I sent the mayor to you just now. Beware of my colleague, and trust me; I will save you all!'

'But what is it?' asked Mademoiselle Goujet.

'It is a matter of life and death! Do you not see that?' Corentin replied.

Madame d'Hauteserre fainted. To Mademoiselle Goujet's great surprise, and Corentin's no less great disappointment, Laurence's room was empty. Corentin felt sure that no creature could escape out of the park or the château into the valley. Every issue was guarded. So he ordered up a gendarme into every room, instituted a thorough search through the stables and outbuildings, and went down again to the drawing-room. By this time,

Durieu, his wife, and the rest of the household had rushed thither in a state of terrific excitement. Peyrade's little blue eyes scrutinised every face, he was the one cool and unmoved spectator of the commotion.

Corentin came down alone, for Mademoiselle Goujet was attending to Madame d'Hauteserre. As he came in, they heard the sound of trampling horses and the wail of a child. The horses came through the gateway; and in the midst of the general anxiety and terror, the constable appeared, pushing Gothard, whose hands were tied, and Catherine, before the agents of police.

'Here are some prisoners,' said he. 'This little rascal was on horseback, and ran away.'

'Idiot!' muttered Corentin, to the bewilderment of the constable. 'Why didn't you let them alone? We might have found out something by following them.'

Gothard had decided to burst into tears in an idiotic fashion. Catherine's expression of artless innocence set the old agent of police meditating profoundly. Lenoir's scholar compared the boy and girl; he had already made a close scrutiny of the whole party, — of the intelligent curé, who was toying with the counters on the table, of the bewildered servants, and the Durieus. M. d'Hauteserre, with his simple countenance, he took for a very deep old gentleman. He went across to Corentin and said in a low voice, 'We have not to do with fools.'

For answer Corentin glanced significantly at the card-table. 'They were playing at boston,' said he; 'the mistress of the house was going to bed; they have been taken at unawares; we shall have them fast directly.'

A gap always has its uses; there was never a gap yet without a reason for it. Now for the why and wherefore of the breach between the stables and the tower that they call Mademoiselle's Tower to this day. At one time, the surface water of the forest had been drained

off by a long gully into the castle moat. When old M. d'Hauteserre came to Cinq-Cygne, he turned the gully into a roadway across the uncultivated lands of the château, simply for the purpose of planting out some hundred or so of walnut saplings which he found in a plantation. That was eleven years ago. The walnut trees since then had grown tolerably thick, almost overspreading the lane which lay six feet below the banks on either side, and ended in a coppice about thirty acres in extent, — a recent purchase.

When every one was at home at the château, the whole household preferred the short cut by the breach in the fosse, to the longer way round over the bridge to the communal road that followed the park walls. It was the nearer way to the farm; so, quite unintentionally, the gap was enlarged on either side, and with the less scruple because a fosse is utterly useless in the nineteenth century, and M. d'Hauteserre often talked of turning it to account. Earth, gravel, and stones were continually pulled down from the sides, until at last the bottom of the ditch was filled in, and a sort of causeway raised high and dry above the water, which only covered it in very rainy weather. Still, in spite of this dilapidation, in which the Countess herself did her part, the place was so steep that it was no easy matter to take a horse up through the breach, while the climb to the communal road was more difficult still; but it would seem that in danger a horse makes his master's thought his own.

While the Countess was hesitating to follow Marthe and asking for explanations, Michu, watching from his knoll, saw the moving lines of gendarmes, comprehended the spies' plan, and gave all up for lost as no one came. A picket of gendarmes followed the park walls, and spread themselves out like sentinels, — one man just so far from the next that he could see him and hear him call. Not the least thing, not the faintest rustle, could escape them.

Michu, lying flat on his stomach, with his ear close to the ground, calculated the time that remained, Indian fashion, by the loudness of the sound.

'I have come too late!' he said to himself. 'Violette shall pay for this. What a time he took to get drunk! What is to be done?'

He heard another picket pass through the iron gate. Apparently the men had come down from the forest, for another band came to join them by way of the communal road.

'Five or six minutes still left,' he thought. And at that moment the Countess appeared. Michu's strong hands caught her and dropped her into the shaded lane. 'Go straight ahead! Show her the way to the place where my horse is standing,' he added, turning to his wife, 'and don't forget that gendarmes have ears.'

Danger stimulated Michu's imagination. At sight of Catherine with the hat and gloves and riding-whip, he resolved to outwit the gendarmes as he had outwitted Violette, especially as Gothard came up just then with the mare; the boy had forced her to climb the gap as if by magic.

'Bandages on the mare's hoofs! I could kiss you,' he cried, hugging Gothard in his arms. He left the animal to follow her mistress, and took the hat and gloves and riding-whip.

'You have your wits about you, you will understand me,' continued he. 'Force your horse up into the road. Ride bare-backed, trail the gendarmes after you, and run for your life towards the farm. Just draw off all this picket in a body,' he added, waving a hand in the direction Gothard was to take. Then he turned to Catherine.

'As for you, my girl, there are some more gendarmes coming down on us from Gondreville. Off with you in the opposite direction, and draw the picket away from the château into the forest. In fact, manage so that we shall have no trouble with them here in the hollow.'

Catherine and the remarkable child, who was to give so many proofs of intelligence in the course of this affair, both executed this manœuvre with such skill, that a line of gendarmes on either side believed that their prey was escaping them.

It was impossible in the uncertain moonlight to make sure of the sex, dress, or number of the fugitives, so the whole picket was soon in hot pursuit on the strength of the fallacious axiom that 'any one who runs away ought to be stopped.' The folly of this course in the higher branches of the detective service had subsequently been pointed out to the constable by Corentin in forcible language; but Michu had reckoned rightly upon the gendarmes' instinct. He was able to reach the forest some seconds after the Countess. Marthe had led the way to the spot.

'Run back to the lodge,' Michu said to his wife. 'The forest is sure to be guarded by the Parisians; it is not safe to stay here. We shall want all our liberty, I have no doubt.'

Michu untied his horse as he spoke, and asked the Countess to follow him.

'I shall go no further,' said Laurence, 'unless you give me some pledge of the interest that you take in me. After all, you are Michu ——'

'Mademoiselle,' he said gently, 'two words will explain the part I am playing. I am the MM. de Simeuse's trustee, all unknown to them. I took my instructions from my lord, their late father, and their dear mother, my patroness. So I have played the part of rabid Jacobin, to serve my young masters; unluckily I began the game too late; my old master and mistress I could not save.'

Michu's voice faltered.

'Since the young gentlemen fled, I have sent them the money they needed to live as befitted their rank.'

'Through the firm of Breintmayer, at Strasbourg?'

'Yes, Mademoiselle, Strasbourg correspondents of M. Girel of Troyes. M. Girel is a Royalist, but to save his property he turned Jacobin as I did. That paper which your farmer picked up one evening coming out of Troyes, referred to this business; it might have got us both into trouble, and my life was not my own but theirs. Do you understand? I could not get possession of Gondreville. They would have wanted to know where I got so much money, and, situated as I was, they might as well have cut my throat. I preferred to wait and buy later on; but the scoundrel Marion was acting for that other scoundrel Malin. Gondreville shall go back to its owners all the same. That is my affair. Four hours ago, I had Malin at the end of my rifle; oh, he was past praying for! Lord! once he was dead, there would be a compulsory sale, and you could buy the place. If anything happened to me, my wife would have brought you a letter that would have given you the means. But that brigand was telling his crony Grévin (another of the scum of the earth) that the MM. de Simeuse were plotting against the First Consul, that they were in the neighbourhood, and that it would be better to betray them and be rid of them so as to own Gondreville in peace. Now, as I had just set eyes on two arrant spies, I took the charge out of my rifle, and lost no time over coming here. I thought that you ought to know where and how the young gentlemen could be warned. That is all.'

'You are worthy to be a noble,' said Laurence, holding out her hand. Michu made as if he would kneel to kiss it, but Laurence stopped him.

'Stand up, Michu,' she said, and something in her tone and look made him as happy at that moment as he had been unhappy for twelve years past.

'You are rewarding me,' he said, 'as if I had done all that I have yet to do. Do you hear those gallows-purveyors? Come, let us talk somewhere else.'

Michu took the mare by the bridle and helped the Countess to mount.

'Give your whole mind to holding on tight,' he said, 'to using the whip, and steering clear of the branches that will slash you across the face.'

For half an hour he led her at full gallop; they turned and twisted and went round and about to cut off the trail across the glades, till they reached a point where he stopped.

'I have no idea where I am,' said the Countess, looking about her, 'though I know the forest as well as you do.'

'We are right in the middle of it,' he answered. 'There are two gendarmes after us, but we are safe.'

The picturesque spot to which the bailiff brought Laurence was to play such a momentous part in the lives of the principal characters in the story (Michu included), that it becomes the chronicler's duty to describe it. And not only so, the place became famous in the judicial calendar of the Empire, as shall be shown.

The Forest of Nodesme once belonged to the monastery of Notre Dame. That monastery, seized, sacked, and demolished, disappeared entirely; neither monks nor lands remained. The coveted forest became a part of the lands of the counts of Champagne, who afterwards pledged it and allowed it to be sold. In the course of six hundred years, nature covered the ruins over with her luxuriant mantle of lusty green, hiding them so effectually that nothing but a tolerably low mound overshaded by tall forest trees marked the spot where one of the finest of old convents once had stood. A dense thicket surrounded the place, and since 1794 it had pleased Michu to plant thorny acacias among the bushes. A pool below the mound indicated a hidden spring which doubtless determined the site of the convent in former times. Nobody but the owner of the title-deeds of the Forest of Nodesme could have traced the etymology of a world eight centuries old, or discovered that there had been a monastery in the woods in days of yore.

Just as the first mutterings of the thunder of revolution were heard, a lawsuit obliged the Marquis de Simeuse to refer to his title-deeds. These particulars chanced to attract his attention, and he began a search for the site of the monastery. It is easy enough to imagine the thought he must have had in his mind. The head keeper, knowing the forest well, assisted his master in the quest; and it was Michu's woodcraft which discovered the spot. He saw that there were five principal roadways, some of them almost undistinguishable in the forest; and he noticed that they all converged at this point, near the mound beside the pool. In former times they must have led from the monastery to Troyes, to the valley of Arcis, the valley of Cinq-Cygne, and to Bar-sur-Aube. The Marquis meant to make excavations in the mound, but he could not employ natives of the district on the work, and the pressure of circumstances compelled him to give up the idea. But the idea that the mound contained hidden treasure or the foundations of the abbey, remained in Michu's mind, and he carried on the archæological investigations by himself. Just at the level of the pool, between two trees at the foot of the one bit of steep bank, he found that the ground rang hollow under foot. Then one clear night he brought a pickaxe and worked till he laid bare an opening into a cellar, and several stone steps.

The pool, only three feet deep at the most, was shaped like a spade, with the handle issuing from the mound. A spring apparently rose in the artificial rock of masonry, filtered away out of sight, and was lost in the vast forest. All the neglected wood paths, all the tracks of ancient roads and forest rides led to this marshy spot with its fringe of waterside trees, its ashes, willows, and alders. The water seemed to be stagnant, but it was always running under the broad-leaved weeds and cresses; for the whole green surface of the pool was scarcely distinguishable from its margin of thick, delicate grasses. So lonely was it that

no animal save the wild creatures came to feed there. The mound was difficult of access; keepers and sportsmen were fully persuaded that nothing could exist below the marsh; so they never visited, searched, or sounded that part of the forest where the tallest timber grew under Michu's supervision till its turn should come to be cut down.

At the back of this cellar there was a clean, dry, and wholesome vaulted cell, built of freestone, something after the manner of that kind of conventual dungeon known as an *in pace*. The spring seemed to have been respected in the general demolition, for the cistern wall, built of brick and mortar such as the Romans used, was apparently of immense thickness; to which cause probably the wholesomeness of the place and the good condition of the steps were due.

Michu covered the mouth of the retreat with huge stones, and the better to keep the secret to himself, he made it a rule never to approach the place by way of the pool, but to climb the wooded mound and drop down from above.

When the two fugitives reached the spot the century-old trees that grew on the mound were tipped with bright silver by the moonlight; it played over the stately clusters among the glades that met about the spot, and the broad or narrow wedges of the woodland which ended sometimes in a clump, sometimes in a single tree. Your eyes were drawn irresistibly to the glimpses of the distance down some curving path, by some black wall of leaves in shadow, or along a sublime, far-reaching vista of forest trees. The light, filtering down through the branches about the meeting of the ways, found the still water out of sight under the cresses and lily leaves, and lit a diamond spark here and there. The croaking of the frogs was the only sound that troubled the deep silence of this fair nook of forest, where the wild scents stirred thoughts of freedom in the soul.

'Are we really safe?' the Countess asked Michu.

'Yes, Mademoiselle. But we have each of us something to do. Tie up the horses to the trees on the top of the bank, and muzzle them both,' he added, holding out his neck handkerchief; 'they are intelligent creatures; they will understand and keep quiet. When that is done jump down off the bank to the water's edge; take care not to catch your habit against anything, and you will find me below.'

While the Countess hid the horses, and tied them up, and fastened the handkerchiefs over their nostrils, Michu cleared away the stones from the opening into the cellar. Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne thought that she knew the forest thoroughly; she was amazed to the last degree to find herself under the vaulted roof. Michu put back the stones as skilfully as any mason. He had scarcely finished before the trampling of horse hoofs and the voices of the gendarmes rang through the still night air; nevertheless, he struck a light with much composure, kindled a bit of pine torch, led the way into the *in pace*, where he found an end of candle left behind after an exploring expedition. The iron door he himself had put into repair; though eaten through with rust in several places it was nearly an inch thick and was bolted on the outside. An iron ring still hung from the wall, above the stone bench on which the Countess de Cinq-Cygne sank down, exhausted.

'We have a parlour to talk in,' said Michu. 'The gendarmes may go round and about as much as they like; if the worst comes to the worst, they will only take the horses.'

'Take our horses,' repeated Laurence de Cinq-Cygne. 'If they do, it might be the death of my cousins and the d'Hauteserres! . . . Let us see now, what do you know?'

Michu repeated the scrap of Malin's conversation with Grévin.

'They are on their way to Paris now! They are to reach Paris this morning!' said the Countess when he ended.

'It is all over with them!' exclaimed Michu. 'There will be men at the barriers to watch every one who comes in or out of Paris, you may be sure. It is in every way to Malin's interest to allow my masters to compromise themselves hopelessly, so as to get rid of them.'

'And I know nothing of the general scheme!' cried Laurence. 'How can I send warning to Georges and Rivière and Moreau? Where are they? In short, let us think simply of my cousins and the d'Hauteserres, and overtake them, cost what it may.'

'Signalled messages travel faster than the best horse,' said Michu, 'and of all the nobles deep in this plot, your cousins will be most thoroughly hunted down. If I can overtake them, they must be hidden here; we will keep them here till the affair is over. Their poor father perhaps had a vision of this when he set me on the track of the hiding-place; he had a presentiment that his sons would fly to it in danger.'

'My mare was bred in the Comte d'Artois's stables. Her sire was his best English thoroughbred, but I have ridden her between eighty and ninety miles to-day; she would drop down dead on the road.'

'I have a good horse,' replied Michu. 'If you have ridden between eighty and ninety miles, I should not have much more than forty to ride.'

'Fifty-five,' said she; 'they were to be on their way by five o'clock. You will find them above Lagny at Coupvrai. They are to leave Coupvrai at dawn, disguised as boatmen; they mean to enter Paris by boat. Here is the one token that they will believe,' she continued, giving the broken half of her mother's wedding-ring. 'I gave them the other half. The keeper at Coupvrai is the father of one of the men they have with them; he found them a hiding-place in a charcoal-burner's hut in the woods.

There are eight in all. My cousins have four men with them beside the MM. d'Hautserre.'

'Nobody will run after the men, Mademoiselle; let us look after the MM. de Simeuse, and leave the rest to do as they like about getting away. Is it not enough to give a call of "Heads, oh"?'

'Leave the d'Hauteserres? Never!' she said. 'They must all escape or all die together.'

'Little country squires?' objected Michu.

'They are only squires, I know,' she said; 'but they are connected with the Cinq-Cygnes and the Simeuses. So bring back my cousins and the d'Hauteserres, and take counsel with them as to the best way of reaching the forest here.'

'There are the gendarmes! Do you hear? They are having a consultation.'

'After all, you have been lucky twice already to-night. Go, bring them back, and hide them here in this hole. They will be quite safe. And I can be of no use whatever to you,' she cried passionately. 'I should be a beacon to give light to their enemies. The police will never think that they could come back to the forest when they see me stay quietly at home. And now the whole question is this,' she continued, 'how to find five good horses that will bring them from Lagny to our forest in six hours; five horses to be left dead in a thicket.'

'And money?' asked Michu. He had been thinking intently as he listened.

'I gave my cousins a hundred louis, just now.'

'I will answer for their lives,' Michu exclaimed. 'When once they are hidden you must give up any attempt to see them. My wife or my boy will take food to them twice a week. But I cannot answer for my own life; so I must tell you, Mademoiselle, in case anything should happen, that in the cross-beam in the garret roof there is a hole bored by an auger, and stopped with a wooden plug. Inside

there is a plan of a bit of the forest. All the trees marked with a red dot on the plan, bear a black mark on them on the ground, and each one of those trees is a sign-post. Under the third old oak from each of the sign-post trees, two feet away from the trunk, and seven feet underground, there lies a tin canister containing a hundred thousand francs in gold. Those eleven trees, for there are only eleven of them, are all the fortune left to the Simeuses now that Gondreville has been taken from them.'

'It will take a century for the noblesse to recover from the blows dealt to them,' Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne said slowly.

'Is there a password?' Michu asked.

'*France* and *Charles* for the men, and *Laurence* and *Louis* for the d'Hauteserres and Simeuses. O, God! to have seen them again for the first time after eleven years, and to know that they are in danger of death to-day, and what a death! Michu,' she said, with a melancholy expression in her face, 'be as careful during these next fifteen hours as you have been great and devoted all through the twelve years. If anything should happen to my cousins, I should die. No, not until I had killed Bonaparte,' she added.

'There will be two of us for that,' he said, 'on the day when all is lost.'

Laurence grasped Michu's rough hand in hers, and shook it in the English fashion. Michu looked at his watch. It was midnight.

'Let us get out at all costs,' he said. 'The gendarme that tries to stop me had better look out! And you, Madame la Comtesse, would it not be better for you to go back to the château at full gallop? They are there; keep them in play.'

Michu unstopped the entrance, and heard nothing; he flung himself flat on the ground to listen, and then rose suddenly to his feet.

'They are on the outskirts of the forest near Troyes,' he said; 'I will give them leg-bail.'

He helped the Countess to climb out, replaced the heap of stones. When he had finished, he heard Laurence's sweet voice calling to him; she wished to see him mount first. There were tears in the rough keeper's eyes as he exchanged a last glance with his young mistress, but Laurence was dry eyed.

'Let us keep them in play; he is right,' she said to herself when the last sounds had died away. And she set out at a gallop for Cinq-Cygne.

When Madame d'Hauteserre knew that her sons' lives were in danger, the very violence of the anguish which stunned her brought her back to her senses and gave her strength. She could not believe that the Revolution was over; she had had experience of the summary justice dealt in times past; and a dreadful curiosity drew her down to the salon. The sight that met her eyes was in truth worthy of a painter of genre.

The curé was still sitting at the card-table, playing mechanically with the counters, while he kept a furtive watch on Peyrade and Corentin, who stood in the chimney corner talking together with lowered voices. Several times Corentin's keen eyes had happened to meet the curé's no less keen glances, but both of them promptly looked away, much as two equally matched fencers might fall back on guard after crossing swords.

Old d'Hauteserre, planted like a heron on his two feet, stood beside Goulard, the big and burly miser, whose attitude assumed in his first bewilderment was still unchanged. As for the mayor, though he dressed like a master he always looked like a servant. Both men stared stupidly at the gendarmes, on either side of Gothard. The boy was still crying; his hands had been tied in such a rigorous fashion that they were purple and swollen. Catherine

maintained her position; she was quite simple and artless and quite inscrutable. The constable, who according to Corentin had made a silly blunder by arresting these good little souls, was in two minds whether he ought to stay or go, so he stood absorbed in thought in the middle of the room, with his hand on his sabre hilt and his eyes on the men from Paris. The bewildered Durieus and the group of servants made an admirable picture of anxiety. If it had not been for Gothard's sobbing you could have heard a pin drop.

All faces were turned towards the door when it opened and the mother appeared, white and terror-stricken, almost carried by Mademoiselle Goujet, whose eyes were red with weeping. The two agents of police hoped and the rest of the party feared to see Laurence enter with them. The spontaneous movement of the family, the servants included, might have been caused by some mechanical contrivance that sets a row of wooden puppets making one single gesture or blinking their eyes with one accord.

Madame d'Hauteserre made three hasty paces towards Corentin and cried out, in a broken but excited voice: —

'For pity's sake, Monsieur, of what are my sons accused? And do you think that they can be here?'

The curé, watching the old lady, lowered his eyes. 'She will make a mess of it,' he seemed to say to himself.

'My duty and the mission which I am fulfilling will not permit me to tell you that,' replied Corentin, with satirical urbanity.

The young fop's odious affability made his refusal even more hopelessly emphatic; the old mother seemed to be turned to stone. She sank down into an easy-chair beside the Abbé Goujet, clasped her hands, and put up a prayer.

'Where did you find that cry-baby?' inquired Corentin, indicating Laurence's little squire to the constable.

'On the road to the farm along by the park walls; the rogue was making for the wood at Closeaux.'

'And the girl?'

'She? It was Olivier that nabbed her.'

'Where was she going?'

'Towards Gondreville.'

'One going one way, and the other, another?'

'Yes,' said the gendarme.

'He is the Citoyenne Cinq-Cygne's page, and the girl is her maid, I think,' said Corentin, addressing the mayor.

'Yes,' answered Goulard.

Corentin and Peyrade held a brief, whispered conference on this, and the latter went out with the constable. The Arcis constable came in, and spoke to Corentin in a low voice.

'I know the premises well,' he said. 'I have made a thorough search through the outbuildings; there is nobody there unless the young fellows are buried underground. We have sounded all the walls and floors with our gun-stocks.'

Peyrade came in, beckoned Corentin out of the room, took him to see the gap in the fosse, and pointed out the hollow way beyond.

'We have found out the dodge,' said he.

'And I'll tell you what it was,' said Corentin. 'That little jackanapes and the girl put those stupid idiots of gendarmes on the wrong scent, so that the game got clear away.'

'We shall not know how things really are before daylight,' returned Peyrade. 'The lane is damp. I have posted a couple of gendarmes at top and bottom, to stop the way; and as soon as we can see, we will find out who it was that went that way by the footprints.'

'There is the mark of a horseshoe here,' said Corentin. 'Let us go round to the stables.'

'How many horses are there here?' demanded Peyrade, when they returned to the salon.

'Come, come, master mayor, you know; answer!' cried Corentin, seeing that that functionary hesitated.

'Why, there is the Countess's mare, there is Gothard's horse, and M. d'Hauteserre's ——'

'We only saw one in the stable,' remarked Peyrade.

'Mademoiselle has gone out,' said Durieu.

'Does your ward often go out at night in this way?' asked the dissolute Peyrade.

'Very frequently,' the old gentleman answered simply, 'as M. le Maire can testify.'

'She has her crotchets, as all the world knows,' put in Catherine. 'She looked out at the sky before she went to bed; she saw your bayonets shining in the distance, I expect, and that puzzled her. She told me when she went out that she wanted to know if there was another new Revolution going on.'

'When did she go out?' asked Peyrade.

'When she saw your guns.'

'And which way did she go?'

'I do not know.'

'And the other horse?' suggested Corentin.

'The g-g-gendarmes t-t-took him awa-wa-way from me,' sobbed little Gothard.

'Then where were you going?' asked a gendarme.

'I wa-wa-was g-going after m-my mistress to the f-f-farm!'

The gendarme looked up as if he expected an order; but this kind of talk was so natural yet so artful, so profoundly innocent yet so shrewd, that again the men from Paris looked at one another as if to repeat Peyrade's dictum, 'These are no fools.'

The master of the house apparently had not wit enough to understand a gibe. The mayor was plainly a dolt. The mother, driven out of her maternal wits, was putting hopelessly silly questions to agents of police. All these people had really been surprised in their sleep. Corentin

with all these little facts before him, weighed the characters of these diverse personages, and at once came to the conclusion that his one real antagonist was Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne.

The detective, however clever he may be, labours under a great many disadvantages. Not only is he obliged to find out all that the conspirator knows already, but he is further bound to invent hypotheses by the hundred until he chances upon the right one. A conspirator is always thinking of his safety, while the detective is only on the alert at certain times. If it were not for traitors conspiracy would be the easiest thing in the world. A conspirator has more ingenuity in his single head than the whole body of detectives with all their immense resources in action. Corentin and Peyrade felt that they were pulled up, mentally speaking. They had been driven, as it were, to pick a lock instead of finding an open door, and now discovered that several persons on the other side were silently leaning all their weight against it. Corentin and Peyrade saw that some one had guessed their plans and outwitted them; but who this was they did not know.

'If the MM. de Simeuse and d'Hauteserre spent the night here,' the Arcis constable said in a low voice, 'I will be bound that they either slept in the beds belonging to their father and mother, Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne and the servants, or else they tramped up and down in the park all night, for there is not the slightest sign to show that they have been here.'

'Then who can have given them warning?' Corentin asked turning to Peyrade. 'Nobody knows anything yet, except the First Consul and Fouché, the Prefect of Police, the Ministers, and Malin.'

'We will leave some *sheep* in the neighbourhood,' whispered Peyrade.

'And that so much the better because your sheep will

be in Champagne,'[1] said the curé; he could not help smiling when he heard that word *sheep*, and guessed all that was meant by it.

'Dear me,' thought Corentin, smiling back at the curé, 'there is one intelligent man here. I may arrive at an understanding with him; I will have a try.'

But the mayor meant at all events to give some proof of his zeal for the First Consul; he addressed himself to Fouché's agents.

'Gentlemen ——'

'Say citizens; the Republic is still in existence,' suggested Corentin, with a satirical smile at the curé.

'Citizens,' began the mayor, 'just as I came into this room and before I could open my mouth, Catherine came flying in for her mistress's hat and gloves and riding-whip.'

A low murmur of disgust came from the depths of every chest save Gothard's. All eyes, save the eyes of the police agents, flashed fire and threatenings at Goulard the informer.

'Good Citizen Mayor,' said Peyrade, 'we see through this perfectly well. Somebody gave the Citizeness Cinq-Cygne a very timely warning,' he added, eyeing Corentin with evident distrust.

'Constable, put handcuffs on the little chap,' said Corentin, 'and shut him up alone. Lock up this little girl, too,' he added, pointing to Catherine. — 'You will superintend the search of the papers, now,' he continued, turning to Peyrade. He lowered his voice to say a few words, and then added aloud. 'Search through them all, spare nothing. — M. l'Abbé,' he continued, 'I have an important communication to make.' He led the way into the garden.

'M. l'Abbé, you seem to me to have all the wit of a bishop, and — nobody can overhear us — you will under-

[1] An allusion to the saying, *Quatre-vingt-dix-neuf moutons et un Champenois font cent bêtes.*

For the French word *mouton* in its sense of police spy, no English equivalent exists. — Tr.

stand me, my one hope is in you. Here are two families brought by some foolish blunder to the brink of a precipice from which no one comes back if he once falls over. The MM. de Simeuse and d'Hauteserre have been betrayed by one of the vile informers insinuated into every plot by the Government, so as to make sure of the methods employed, the people involved in it, and their object. Do not confuse me with the wretch, my companion; he is a mere detective, while I have the last word of the consular cabinet to which I am very honourably attached. It is not desired that the MM. de Simeuse should be ruined; Malin might like to see them shot, but the First Consul wishes to stop them on the brink of the precipice (if they are here, that is, and if they have no criminal designs), for he has a liking for a good soldier. My fellow agent has all the power; I, in appearance, am nobody, but I know how the land lies. Malin has given him a hint, has promised to use his influence, no doubt, to get him a place and money as well, very likely, if he can find the two Simeuses and give them up. The First Consul is a really great man; he has no sympathy with covetousness and greed.

'I have not the least wish to know whether the young men are here,' continued Corentin, in reply to a gesture from the curé, 'but there is only one way of saving them. You know the law of 6th of Floréal, year X? It offers an amnesty to all *émigrés* still resident abroad, on condition that they return before the 1st Vendémiaire of the year XI, which is to say, before the September of last year. But as the MM. de Simeuse and the MM. d'Hauteserre likewise have held commands in the Army of Condé, they are among the exceptions made by that same law. So their presence in France is a criminal offence; it will be taken, under the circumstances, as a sufficient proof of their complicity in a detestable plot. The First Consul has felt the weak point of the exception made by the law of the 6th Floréal; he sees that it makes irreconcilable enemies for

his Government; he wishes it to be made known to the MM. de Simeuse, that no steps will be taken against them, if they address a petition to the proper quarter, stating that they have come back to France with a view to making their submission to the laws, and promising to take the oath to the Constitution. You can understand that this document must be in his hands before they are arrested; it should be dated a few days back; I can be the bearer. . .

'I do not ask you where the young men are,' he went on, as the curé shook his head again. 'Unfortunately we are only too sure to find them. The forest is patrolled, the gates of Paris are watched, so is the frontier. Attend carefully to this that I am about to say! If the gentlemen are anywhere between the forest and Paris, they will be taken. If they are at Paris, they will be found there. If they turn back, the unfortunates will be arrested. The First Consul is well disposed towards *ci-devants*, and cannot bear Republicans; and this is quite natural. If he wants a throne he is bound to murder liberty first. This between ourselves. Now, see here! I will wait till to-morrow; I will be blind; but be on your guard with the agent. That damned Provençal is the devil's own lackey; he has Fouché's instructions just as I have mine from the First Consul.'

'If the MM. de Simeuse are here,' said the curé, 'I would give ten pints of my blood and an arm to save them; but, if Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne is in their confidence, not the slightest word has escaped her, and she has not done me the honour to consult me. I swear it by my salvation. At this moment I am profoundly glad that she has kept her own counsel, always supposing that she had any counsel to keep. We were playing a game of boston to-night, as usual; the house was perfectly quiet until half-past ten; we neither saw nor heard anything. A child cannot come into this lonely valley but everybody sees and knows it, and for the last fortnight not a single

stranger has been here. Now the MM. d'Hauteserre and de Simeuse make a party of four by themselves. The old gentleman and his wife have submitted to the Government; they have made every imaginable effort to bring their sons home; they wrote to them only yesterday. So, upon my soul and conscience, it took your descent upon us here to shake my firm belief that they are in Germany. Between ourselves, the young Countess is the only person in the house who fails to do justice to the eminent merits of M. le Premier Consul.'

'Sly dog!' thought Corentin. Aloud he said, 'If the young men are taken and shot, it will only be what they deserve. I wash my hands of it now.'

He had walked with the abbé to an open space; the moon was shining down full upon them, and as he uttered those fatal words, he looked up sharply, full in his companion's face. The abbé was deeply distressed; but he seemed both surprised and wholly ignorant.

'Just remember, M. l'Abbé,' Corentin went on, 'that they are doubly criminal in the eyes of subordinates, because they have a right to Gondreville. In fact, I want them to pray to Providence, and not to the saints.'

'Then there is a plot?' the curé asked naïvely.

'A base, hateful, cowardly plot, so contrary to the generous spirit of the nation that it will meet with reprobation on all sides,' replied Corentin.

'Oh, well! Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne is incapable of baseness,' exclaimed the curé.

'M. l'Abbé,' returned Corentin, 'look here. We have (this is still between you and me), we have unmistakable proof of her complicity, but not enough as yet to serve as evidence in a court of law. She takes flight as soon as we come. . . And yet, I had sent the mayor to you.'

'Yes, but you followed rather close upon the mayor's heels for a man that had it so much on his mind to save them,' remarked the abbé.

The two men looked one another in the eyes. There was no more to be said. Both were deeply learned anatomists of human thought; a simple inflexion of the voice, an expression, a word was enough; they could guess the kind of man with whom they had to do, just as a savage knows his enemies by tokens invisible to European eyes.

'I thought I should get something out of him,' thought Corentin, 'and he has found me out.'

'Oh, the scoundrel!' the curé said to himself.

The old church clock struck twelve as Corentin and the curé came back to the drawing-room. There was a sound as of opening and shutting chamber doors and cupboards. The gendarmes were pulling the beds to pieces. Peyrade, with a spy's quick intelligence, was ferreting and probing everywhere. The faithful servants of the family stood motionless as before, half terrified, half indignant at this raid. M. d'Hauteserre exchanged compassionate glances with his wife and Mademoiselle Goujet. A dreadful curiosity kept every one on the alert. Just then Peyrade came down with a box in his hand. It was a small, carved sandalwood box, that the Admiral de Simeuse must have brought from China,—a pretty, flat box, the size and shape of a quarto volume.

Peyrade beckoned Corentin to the window.

'I have it!' he said. 'That Michu who could pay Marion a hundred thousand francs in gold for Gondreville, and wanted to kill Malin just now, must be the Simeuses's man. He threatened Marion and stalked Malin from the same motive. He seemed to me to be capable of carrying ideas in his head; he has only one idea; he got to know how matters are, and he must have come to give the alarm here.'

'Yes, Malin would be talking about the plot with his friend the notary,' said Corentin, following out his colleague's reasoning; 'and Michu being in ambush, no doubt would hear the Simeuses's name mentioned. In short,

Michu only brought himself to postpone his chance of a shot at him, to prevent a calamity which seemed to him to be even greater than the loss of Gondreville.'

'He saw quite well what we are,' remarked Peyrade. 'And it seemed to me, at the time, that that peasant's intelligence bordered on the marvellous.'

'Oh! this proves that he was on his guard,' replied Corentin. 'But, after all, old man, we mustn't run away with the wrong idea. Treachery stinks prodigiously, and primitive folk smell it afar off.'

'So much the better for us,' rejoined the Provençal. Corentin called to a gendarme.

'Send in the Arcis constable,' he said, adding to Peyrade, 'Let us send down to the lodge.'

'Violette is there; his ears are in our interest.'

'We set out before we heard from him, though,' said Corentin. 'We ought to have brought Sabatier. Two of us are not enough.'

When the gendarme came in, Corentin edged him in between himself and Peyrade.

'Constable,' he said, 'don't let them take a rise out of you, as they did just now out of the constable from Troyes. It looks to us as if Michu were in this affair. Go down to the lodge, take a look round, and report.'

'One of my men heard horses in the forest, when they made prisoners of the lad and girl; and I have four stout fellows at the heels of those that might be trying to hide there,' said the constable. He went out, set off at a gallop down the paved way across the lawn, and very soon the sounds grew faint in the distance.

'Come; they are either going towards Paris, or on their way back to Germany,' said Corentin to himself. He sat down, took a note-book from the pocket of his spencer, wrote out two orders in pencil, sealed them, and beckoned to a gendarme.

'Ride off to Troyes full speed, wake up the prefect, and

tell him to set the semaphore at work as soon as there is light enough.'

The gendarme galloped off with the message. The meaning of this proceeding and Corentin's intentions were both so plain that the whole household felt something clutch tightly at their hearts; and yet the uneasiness was in some sort an added pang in their anguish, for their eyes were all fixed upon the precious casket. While the two agents spoke together, they furtively read the language of those blazing eyes; and their unfeeling hearts were moved to a sort of cold anger; they enjoyed the consternation about them.

The sensations of the sportsman and the detective are the same; but while the one exerts all the powers of body and mind to kill a hare, a partridge, or a buck, the concern of the other is to save a government or a prince, and to earn a large reward. And this sport, in which man is the game, is superior to all other sport by the whole distance that separates man from the brute. A spy, moreover, is fain to magnify his part by the greatness and importance of the interests at stake. A man has no need to meddle in such a business to realise that there is as much passionate interest thrown into it as ever the hunter can put into the chase. As the two detectives gained a glimmering of the truth, their eagerness grew warmer, but their faces and eyes were indifferent and composed; their suspicions, thoughts, and plan of action were impenetrable as ever. Yet for any one who could have watched these two sleuth-hounds at their work, who could have seen the way in which they tracked down unknown and concealed facts, and have understood the swift, canine instinct which led them to find the truth after a rapid survey of probabilities, there was something, I say, in all this to make one shudder.

How and why had these men of genius fallen so low, when they might have been so high? What flaw, what defect, what passion was it that had so debased them? Is

a man a detective, as others are thinkers, writers, statesmen, painters, commanders on the battle-field, on condition that he shall do nothing but play the spy, just as other men do nothing but speak, write books, govern, paint, or fight, all their lives long? At the château there was but one wish in the hearts of the household, — 'Will not thunder fall upon these wretches?' Every creature thirsted for revenge. But for the presence of the gendarmes there would have been an outbreak.

'Nobody has the key of the box,' suggested the cynical Peyrade, giving an interrogative force to his remark by turning his great red face upon the company. He noticed as he did so, not without some inward quaking, that there were no gendarmes left in the room. Corentin and he were alone.

Corentin drew a small dagger from his pocket and proceeded to force it under the lid of the box. Even as he did so, they heard the sound of a horse galloping first on the road, afterwards on the paved way across the lawn; it was the terrible sound of a horse at the last gasp, succeeded by the far more dreadful moan, as the animal fell in a heap at the foot of the central turret.

The rustle of a riding-habit was followed by the appearance of Laurence herself, and in a moment the servants stood aside to right and left to allow her to pass. If a thunderbolt had fallen in their midst there could not have been more commotion. Quickly as she had ridden, she had had time to feel the pain that the discovery of the conspiracy must inevitably cause her. All her hopes were wrecked. She had galloped across the ruins of them, thinking all the while that there was nothing for it now but submission to the consular government; and if she had not quelled fatigue and exhaustion with the thought of the four nobles in peril of their lives she would have sunk fainting to the ground. She had all but killed her mare to come back to stand between her cousins and death.

At the sight of the heroic girl with the veil put back from her white, drawn face, and her riding-whip in her hand, every one knew by an almost imperceptible twitch of Corentin's sour, troubled countenance that now the real antagonists were face to face. A dreadful duel was about to begin.

The Countess saw Corentin with the box in his hands; raising her riding-whip she sprang at him so quickly and slashed him so sharply over the hands that the casket dropped to the ground. She snatched it up, flung it into the fire, and stood with her back to the hearth in a defiant attitude before the agents of police could recover from their surprise. Scorn blazed in Laurence's eyes; her white forehead and disdainful lips expressed more of insult than even her autocrat's action as she spurned Corentin for a venomous reptile. The chivalrous instinct was roused in old d'Hauteserre; all the blood rushed into his face; he wished that he had his sword at his side. The servants at first thrilled with joy; the vengeance so long invoked had fallen like a thunderbolt on one of these men; but a hideous fear soon thrust the joy down into the depths of their souls. They could still hear the gendarmes coming and going in the attics overhead.

The *spy*, — for all distinctions among agents of police are confounded and labelled with one vigorous epithet by a public that has never cared to find separate names to suit the various practitioners of a leech-craft indispensable to governments, — the spy has something about him that is magnificent and curious: he never resents anything. His is the Christian humility of the priest; his eyes are used to bear scorn; he raises, as it were, a barrier between himself and the multitude of fools that do not understand him. Insults he meets with brows of brass; he moves to his goal like some creature encased in a shell that nothing short of a cannon-ball can pierce; and, like his prototype of the carapace, he is the more furious when wounded because he

believed himself secure in his armour. For Corentin that slash across the fingers, quite apart from the pain, was like the cannon-ball crashing through the carapace; the gesture, fraught with the loathing of a noble and heroic girl, humiliated him not merely in the eyes of the onlookers, but even in his own.

Peyrade, the Provençal, sprang towards her. Laurence spurned him, but he caught her by the foot and forced her in that undignified fashion back into the low chair where she had lain asleep only a few hours ago. It was a bit of burlesque in the midst of terror, that touch of incongruity which is seldom wanting in human life. Peyrade scorched his hand as he snatched the box from the fire, but he took possession of the thing, dropped it on the floor and sat down upon it. The little events followed in swift succession, without a word. Corentin, recovered from the smarting sensation of the blow, held Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne down by the wrists.

'Do not oblige me to use force to you, fair citoyenne,' he remarked, with withering courtesy.

Peyrade, sitting on his prize, had stifled out the flames.

'Here, men!' he called, still squatting in his odd position.

'Will you promise to behave yourself?' said Corentin, insolently addressing Laurence while he put up his dagger. He did not make the mistake of threatening her.

'The secrets in the box do not concern the Government,' said she, with a touch of melancholy in her face and tone. 'When you have read those letters, vile as you are, you will feel ashamed to have read them. . . . But have you any sense of shame still left?' she added after a pause.

The curé glanced at Laurence. 'For God's sake, calm yourself!' he seemed to say.

Peyrade got up from the floor. The bottom of the box had been almost burnt out on the coals; it had left a scorched mark on the carpet. The lid was almost reduced

to charcoal by this time; the sides gave way; and this grotesque Scævola, who had just sacrificed the seat of his apricot-coloured breeches to the deity of detectives, opened out the casket as if it had been a book. Three letters and two locks of hair slid down upon the baize of the card-table. Peyrade was about to smile significantly at Corentin when he saw that both the locks of hair were almost white. Corentin turned away from Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne, picked up one of the letters, and began to read it.

Laurence also rose and stood beside the agents at the table.

'Oh! read it aloud,' she said; 'that shall be your punishment.'

And as they continued to read to themselves, Laurence herself took up the third letter and began: —

'DEAR LAURENCE, — My husband and I have heard of your noble behaviour on that sad day of our arrest. We know that you love our two darling sons both equally dearly and as much as we love them ourselves, so we are entrusting you with a legacy both sad and dear to them. *M. l'Exécuteur* has just cut off our hair, for we are to die in a very few minutes, and he has promised to give these, the only keepsakes that we can give our dearly loved orphans, into your hands. So keep these locks of our hair to give to them in better days. A last kiss and our blessing goes with each. Our last thought will be of our sons, and then of you, and afterwards of God. Love them dearly, Laurence.

'BERTHE DE CINQ-CYGNE.
'JEAN DE SIMEUSE.'

There were tears in all eyes when the letter had been read.

Laurence turned a stony gaze upon the two agents, and spoke without a tremor in her voice: —

'You have been less merciful than *M. l'Exécuteur!*'

Corentin quite composedly took the letter, put the locks of hair inside it, and laid it aside on the table with a heap of counters on the top as a paper-weight. There was something dreadful in the man's coolness amid the general emotion. Peyrade unfolded the other sheets.

'Oh! as to those,' said Laurence, 'they are almost alike. You heard the will read, now you shall see how it was carried into effect. After this my heart will have no secrets left; this is all.

'ANDERNACH, 1794.
'*Before the battle.*

'MY DEAR LAURENCE,—I shall love you so long as I live, and I want you to know this for certain; but you ought to know in case I should fall, that Paul Marie loves you as I love you. My one comfort if I fall will be the thought that some day you may take this dear brother of mine for your husband, and I shall not be eaten up with jealousy as I certainly should be if that should happen while we both were alive. After all, it seems to me very natural that you should like him better, for perhaps he is more worthy than I am . . . .' and so forth.

'MARIE PAUL.'

'Here is the other,' she went on, while a charming colour flushed her forehead.

'ANDERNACH,
'*Before the battle.*

'MY KIND LAURENCE,—There is a tinge of sadness in my nature; but Marie Paul is so bright and happy that you must care far more for him than for me. Some day, perhaps, you will be obliged to choose between us; well, then —though I love you passionately . . .'

'You have been in correspondence with *émigrés*,' broke in Peyrade, and by way of precaution he held up the letters

to the light to see if anything were written in sympathetic ink between the lines.

'Yes,' said Laurence, folding up the precious letters, yellowed by time. 'But what right have you to force an entrance into my house, to violate the liberty of the subject and all the sacred rights of the hearth?'

'Ah, indeed!' said Peyrade. 'What right? You shall be informed, fair aristocrat.' He drew from his pocket, as he spoke, an order from the Minister of Justice, countersigned by the Minister of the Interior. 'Look you here, citoyenne, the Ministers have taken a notion into their heads ——'

'We might ask you what right you have to harbour assassins of the First Consul,' said Corentin, lowering his voice for her ear. 'When you struck me just now with your riding-whip, you gave me a right to strike a blow in my turn to despatch my lords your cousins — when I had come to save them.'

The curé, watching them, knew what was said by the expression of Laurence's eyes, and the movement of the lips of the great unknown actor; he made a sign to Laurence to beware. Nobody but Goulard saw the gesture. Peyrade was tapping the bottom of the box to see if it was hollow.

'Ah, God!' cried Laurence, snatching away the lid, 'do not break it. Wait!'

She took a pin and pressed it against one of the figures; a spring gave way, the lid came in two, and disclosed two ivory miniatures painted in Germany: the portraits of the Simeuses in the uniforms of the Army of Condé. Corentin, thus confronted by an adversary worthy of his anger, withdrew into a corner with Peyrade. There was a whispered conference.

'And you threw *that* on the fire!' said the Abbé Goujet, looking at the old Marquise's letters and the locks of hair.

For all answer Laurence shrugged her shoulders sig-

nificantly. The curé knew that she had made this supreme sacrifice to keep the spies in play and gain time. He raised his eyes in admiration.

'But where can they have caught Gothard? I can hear him crying,' she added, loud enough to be heard.

'I do not know,' said the curé.

'Had he gone to the farm?'

'Farm!' repeated Peyrade. 'Let us send somebody there.'

'No,' returned Corentin; 'that girl would not have trusted her cousins' lives to a tenant. She is amusing us. Do as I tell you. We made a blunder when we came here; we will at least find out something before we go.'

Corentin went and stood with his back to the fire, and raised his long, pointed coat-tails to warm himself. From his manner, look, and tone, he might have been there on a visit.

'Ladies, you may retire to bed, and the servants likewise. M. le Maire, your services are no longer required. We acted upon strict orders, and could not do otherwise than we have done; but when all the walls, which are very thick, it seems to me, have been examined, we shall go.'

The mayor took leave of the company and went. Neither the curé nor Mademoiselle Goujet stirred, and the servants were too anxious not to stay and see what happened to their mistress. Ever since Laurence came into the room, Madame d'Hauteserre, with a despairing mother's curious gaze, had been poring on the girl's face. Now she took Laurence by the arm, and drew her into a corner, murmuring, 'Have you seen them?'

'How could I have allowed your sons to come under our roof without your knowledge?' returned Laurence. 'Durieu,' she added, 'go and see if it is possible to save my poor Stella; she is still breathing.'

'Has she been ridden far?' asked Corentin.

'Thirty-seven miles in three hours,' said Laurence, addressing her remark to the curé, who gazed at her in dull amazement. 'I went out at half-past nine, and it was after one o'clock when I came in.'

She looked at the clock as she spoke. It was then half-past two.

'Then you do not deny that you have ridden thirty-seven miles?' remarked Corentin.

'No,' said she. 'I admit that my cousins and the MM. d'Hauteserre, in their perfect innocence, meant to make application to be included in the amnesty, and they were on their way back to Cinq-Cygne. So as soon as I had reason to believe that the Sieur Malin meant to implicate them in some treasonable plot, I went to warn them to return to Germany. They will be safely across the frontier before the message can be signalled from Troyes to stop them. If this was a crime, let me be punished for it.'

Laurence's reply had been well thought out; it was so plausible in every respect that Corentin was staggered by it. The Countess watched the agent out of the corner of her eye. Just at this critical moment, when all souls were hanging as it were upon the two faces, and all eyes went from Laurence to Corentin, and from Corentin to Laurence, the sound of a galloping horse reached them from the forest. It grew nearer and nearer, till the rider crossed the bridge and the paved way across the lawn. There was a look of ghastly dread in every face.

It was Peyrade who came in, his face radiant with delight. He hurried to his colleague, and said, loud enough for the Countess to overhear him:—

'We have got Michu!'

Anguish, physical exhaustion, and the strain upon every mental faculty had brought the red colour to Laurence's cheeks; now she grew white once more, and fell, as if

thunder-stricken, half fainting into a chair. La Durieu, Mademoiselle Goujet, and Madame d'Hauteserre sprang towards her. She gasped for breath. She signed to them to cut the loops of braid that fastened her riding-habit.

'She was taken in by it. . . . They are on the way to Paris!' said Corentin, conferring with Peyrade. 'Let us change the orders.'

The pair went out, leaving a gendarme on guard at the door. Their diabolical ingenuity had won them a cruel advantage in this duel; they had ensnared Laurence by a common artifice.

At six o'clock in the morning, with the first grey light, the agents of police came back again. They had explored the hollow lane, and convinced themselves that horses had taken the way into the forest. The château was guarded by gendarmes under a constable's order, while they went off to breakfast at the little wine-shop in the village of Cinq-Cygne; but not before orders had been given that Catherine, persistently stolid and silent, and Gothard who replied to every question by an outbreak of tears, should both be set at liberty. Catherine and Gothard came into the drawing-room, where Laurence was lying in the great low chair, and kissed their mistress's hands. Durieu came in a while to say that Stella was out of danger, though her condition needed great care.

The mayor, fidgety and inquisitive, met Peyrade and Corentin in the village. He could not allow government officials of so high a rank to breakfast in a wretched village wine-shop, and brought them home. The Abbey lay about half a mile away, and on the road thither Peyrade bethought himself that the Arcis constable had not succeeded in bringing any news of Michu or Violette.

'We have no common people to deal with,' remarked Corentin. 'They are too clever for us. The priest has a hand in it, no doubt.'

Madame Goulard had just brought her guests into the

vast, fireless dining-hall, when the lieutenant arrived with a scared face.

'We have just come across the Arcis constable's horse, riderless in the forest,' he told Peyrade.

'Run round to Michu's lodge, lieutenant!' cried Corentin. 'Find out what is going on there. Perhaps they have killed the constable.'

This news spoiled the mayor's breakfast. Huntsmen eating at a halting-place could not have bolted their provisions more rapidly than the two Parisians; and the meal over, they drove back to the château in their basket-chaise with the post-horse, so as to bear down as quickly as possible upon any point, as it might prove necessary.

When they entered the drawing-room whither they had suddenly brought trouble and dismay and sorrow, and the most cruel anxiety, they found Laurence, in a loose wrapper, old M. d'Hauteserre and his wife, and the Abbé Goujet and his sister, all seated about the fire, and to all appearance, quiet in their minds.

'If they had really caught Michu they would have brought him in,' Laurence had said to herself. 'It is mortifying to think that I lost my self-command, and threw a light on those wretches' suspicions; but all can be put right again. Are we going to be your prisoners for long?' she asked aloud, with a satirical, careless air.

The two spies exchanged glances.

'How can she know something of our uneasiness about Michu? Nobody outside could get into the château. She is making fools of us,' their looks seemed to say.

'We shall not trouble you with our presence much longer,' returned Corentin. 'In three hours' time we will make our apologies for disturbing your solitude.'

Nobody answered him. The contemptuous silence exasperated Corentin's inward fury. Laurence and the abbé, the two intellects of this little group, had exchanged views of Corentin to their mutual edification. Catherine

and Gothard set the table by the fire, and the curé and his sister joined the family at breakfast. Neither they nor their servants paid the slightest attention to the spies, and Corentin and Peyrade walked up and down in the gardens, in the court, and along the road, returning now and again to the drawing-room.

At half-past two o'clock the lieutenant put in an appearance.

'I have found the constable,' he reported to Corentin; 'he was lying on the road between the Cinq-Cygne lodge, as they call it, and Bellache. He had no wound except a frightful cut on the head; it looked as if he had got it with that fall. He was knocked backwards off his horse so suddenly that he cannot explain how it happened, he says. His feet slipped out of the stirrups or he would have been dead by now; his horse took fright and might have dragged him along the ground. We left him in charge of Michu and Violette ——'

'What! Is Michu at the lodge?' asked Corentin, watching Laurence as he spoke. The Countess smiled shrewdly to herself, a woman's retaliation.

'He and Violette began bargaining last night, and when I saw him they were near the finish,' said the lieutenant. 'They were both of them a bit flustered, it seemed to me, and no wonder; they have been making a night of it together and have not managed to hit it off yet.'

'Did Violette tell you so?' cried Corentin.

'Yes.'

'Ah! if you want a thing done you must do it yourself!' said Peyrade, looking at Corentin, who seemed to share his poor opinion of the lieutenant's intelligence, and nodded assent to his serious remark.

'When did you reach Michu's place?' asked Corentin. Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne had glanced at the clock, and this fact had not been lost upon him.

'Somewhere about two o'clock,' the lieutenant replied.

Laurence included Monsieur and Madame d'Hauteserre, the Abbé Goujet and his sister in one glance, that seemed to envelop them in a mantle of blue light; the joy of triumph glittered in her eyes; there was colour in her cheeks; there were tears beneath her lashes. The girl that had been so strong to endure could shed no tears but tears of gladness. She was transfigured for them, especially for the curé; he had been almost vexed by Laurence's masculine strength of character; now he saw the woman's exceeding tenderness. Laurence's sensibilities lay like hidden treasure in some unfathomed depths beneath a block of granite.

A gendarme came to ask whether Michu's son was to be allowed to come in; he had brought a message from his father to the gentlemen from Paris. Corentin nodded. François Michu, a sharp boy, and a chip of the old block, was outside in the yard meanwhile; and Gothard, now at liberty, had time to exchange a word or two with him under the gendarme's nose. That functionary did not observe that the boy slipped something into Gothard's hand; and so little Michu accomplished his errand. Gothard stole in behind François, reached Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne, and with an innocent air gave her back both halves of the broken ring. Laurence kissed it with passionate fervour; she knew now that Michu had redeemed his word and that the four nobles were in safety. Meanwhile François was delivering his message.

'Dad wants to know what to do with the constable; he is in a bad way.'

'What is the matter with him?' asked Peyrade.

'It's his head; he came a cropper though and no mistake. For a *gindarme* as knows how to ride a horse, that is bad luck, but he must have stumbled! There is a hole, oh! as big as your fist at the back of his head. Seems that it was his luck to come down on a nasty flint. Poor man! Much good his being a *gindarme* does him; he suffers all the same, till it makes you sorry to see it.'

The captain from Troyes rode into the courtyard, dismounted, and beckoned to Corentin. Corentin rushed to the window and flung it open to save time.

'What is the matter?'

'We have come back like Dutchmen!' he said. 'Five horses have been found ridden to death, hair stiff with sweat, right in the middle of the main avenue through the forest. I have had them kept so that we may find out where they came from and who supplied them. There is a cordon round the forest; nobody inside can get out now.'

'When do you think these horsemen came into the forest?'

'At half-past twelve at noon.'

'Don't let a hare leave unseen,' said Corentin, lowering his voice. 'I will leave Peyrade here, and go to see the constable, poor fellow, directly.' Then turning to Peyrade, 'Stop at the mayor's house; I will send a sharp man to relieve you,' he added. 'We must make use of the people hereabouts; notice all the faces there.'

Then he turned to the company. '*Au revoir!*' he exclaimed, with an appalling ring in his voice. Nobody spoke or moved when the agents of police went out.

'A fruitless domiciliary visit! what will Fouché say?' exclaimed Peyrade, as he handed Corentin into the basket-chaise.

'Oh! all is not over,' returned Corentin, in his associate's ear; 'the Simeuses are sure to be in the forest.'

Laurence was standing in one of the great windows of the dining-room, looking out at them through the small square panes. Corentin glanced significantly towards her.

'There was another once that was at least her equal,' he said. 'She stirred my bile too much, and I did for her. If this one falls into my power again I will pay her out for that cut with the whip.'

'The other[1] was an adventuress,' said Peyrade, 'and this one is——'

[1] See *Les Chouans*.

'Does that make any difference to me? All are fish in the sea,' said Corentin, with a sign to the gendarme to whip up the post-horse.

Ten minutes later the château was completely and entirely evacuated.

'How was the constable got out of the way?' asked Laurence of François Michu. She had food brought for him and made him sit beside her.

'Father and mother said that it was a matter of life and death, and that nobody was to come into the house. So I knew, when I heard horses going about in the forest, that I had to do with those beastly gendarmes, and I tried to keep them from coming to us. I brought down some thick cord out of our garret, and tied it firmly to a tree just at the opening of each way. And while I was about it I tied the cord high up so as to catch a man on horseback across the chest, and left the other end loose till I heard a horse come galloping down one of the roads. Then I made the end fast to the tree opposite, and the road was barred. It fell out all right. The moon had set, the constable came a cropper, but he was not killed. What can you expect? They are so tough, are gendarmes. After all, one does what one can.'

'You saved us!' Laurence said, giving the child a kiss. She went with him as far as the gate, and then looking round to make sure that no one was near, she whispered, 'Have they provisions?'

'I have just taken them a twelve-pound loaf and four bottles of wine. They will keep close for six days.'

Laurence went back to the drawing-room. Monsieur and Madame d'Hauteserre, the Abbé Goujet and his sister, looked at her with questioning eyes in which anxiety and admiration were equally blended.

'Have you really seen them again?' cried Madame d'Hauteserre.

But Laurence, smiling, laid a finger on her lips, and

went upstairs to bed. When once the victory was won, weariness overcame her.

The shortest way from Cinq-Cygne to Michu's lodge was by the road from the village to Bellache; it debouched upon the circular space where the detectives first appeared to Michu, on the previous evening. The Arcis constable had come this way, and the gendarmes now brought Corentin over the same ground. The agent, as he went, was on the lookout for any trace of the means by which the constable was thrown out of the saddle. He rated himself for sending a single man to clear up so important a point, and drew an axiom from the experience to incorporate in a code which he was compiling for his own private use.

'If they put the gendarme out of the way,' thought he, 'they will have got rid of Violette as well. The five dead horses evidently brought back Michu and the four conspirators from the neighbourhood of Paris. Has Michu a horse?' he asked, turning to the gendarme, who happened to belong to the Arcis contingent.

'Ah! yes, and a famous nag it is; a hunter out of the *ci-devant* Marquis's stables. Fifteen years old and only the better for age. Michu will ride thirty miles and more, and the animal's hide will be as dry as my hat. Oh! he thinks a lot of his horse; he won't take money for it.'

'What is the horse like?'

'A dark bay, spotted with white about the feet. A thin animal, all muscle, like an Arab.'

'Have you seen Arabian horses?'

'I came back from Egypt a year ago. I have ridden the Mamelukes' horses. You serve eleven years in the cavalry. I crossed the Rhine with General Steingel, then I was in Italy, and I followed the First Consul in Egypt. So I shall be a corporal soon.'

'While I am in Michu's lodge, just go round to the

stable. If you have lived among horses for eleven years you ought to know when a horse has been ridden hard.'

'There! that is where our corporal was thrown,' said the man, pointing to the spot where the road emerged into the open space.

'Tell the captain to call for me at the lodge here, and we will go together back to Troyes.'

Corentin alighted, and spent several minutes in observing the place. He scrutinised the elm-trees that stood on either side. One grew close beside the park wall, the other on the high boundary bank of the circle, which was intersected at this point by the cross-road. And at length Corentin saw something which every one else had passed over, to wit, a button lying in the dust, a button from a gendarme's uniform. He picked it up. As he entered the lodge, he beheld Violette and Michu sitting at the kitchen table. The dispute was still unfinished. Violette got up, made a bow, and offered Corentin some wine.

'Thanks. . . . I should like to see the corporal,' returned Corentin. He saw at a glance that Violette had been drunk for more than twelve hours.

'My wife is nursing him upstairs,' said Michu. Corentin sprang up the staircase, and found the gendarme lying on Madame Michu's bed, his head covered with poultices. The man's cap, sword, and shoulder-belt lay on a chair. Marthe, all unaware of her son's prowess, was true to her woman's instinct; she and her mother were nursing the wounded man.

'Well, corporal, how are you doing?' asked Corentin.

'M. Varlet, the Arcis doctor, is expected,' Madame Michu replied. 'Gaucher has gone to fetch him.'

'Leave us a moment,' said Corentin, feeling not a little surprised by this scene, for the women's innocence was obvious. 'Where were you hit?' he asked, looking at the man's uniform.

'In the chest.'

'Let us have a look at your shoulder-belt.'

A yellow leather belt with white pipings formed part of the uniform of the 'National Gendarmes,' as they used to be called, a recent law having prescribed the costume and regulated it down to the smallest details. On the belt was a plate similar to the one at present worn by rural policemen, with the singular legend engraved duly upon it, 'Respect individuals and property.' The cord, of course, had left a deep score across the belt. Corentin took up the coat and found the place of the missing button.

'When did they pick you up?' he asked.

'Why, at daybreak.'

'Did they bring you up here at once?' continued Corentin, noticing that the bed had not been slept in.

'Yes.'

'Who brought you up?'

'The women and Michu's boy; he found me lying unconscious.'

'Good!' thought Corentin to himself. 'Then they were up all night. It is clear that the corporal was not knocked off his horse by a bullet, nor yet by a blow from a stick; for in that case the man that dealt the blow must have been on horseback and on a level with him. So he must have been disarmed by something put across the road. A piece of wood? Impossible. An iron chain? It would have left marks. What did you feel?' he asked aloud, scrutinising the corporal as he spoke.

'I was knocked off so suddenly——'

'The skin is grazed under your chin.'

'It seems to me that a rope sawed me across the face.'

'I have it,' said Corentin. 'Somebody tied a rope across the road to stop you——'

'Very likely,' returned the corporal.

Corentin went down into the kitchen.

'Come, old scoundrel, let us have done with it!' Michu was saying; he spoke to Violette, and looked at the spy.

'A hundred and twenty thousand francs in all, and my land is yours. I shall put the money in the funds and be independent.'

'As there is but one God, I have only sixty thousand, I tell you.'

'But when I offer you time for the rest! And here we have been bargaining since yesterday and cannot come to terms! . . . There is no better land anywhere.'

'My land is good,' retorted Violette.

'Wife, bring us some wine!' cried Michu.

'What, haven't you had enough to drink?' called Marthe's mother. 'This is the fourteenth bottle since nine o'clock yesterday.'

'Have you been here since nine o'clock this morning?' said Corentin, turning on Violette.

'No, asking your pardon. I haven't stirred from the place since nine o'clock yesterday night, and I am none the nearer the end. The more he makes me drink, the more he wants for his land.'

'In making a bargain, you raise the price every time you raise your elbow,' said Corentin.

A dozen empty bottles at the end of the table bore out the truth of the old grandmother's statement. Just at that moment the gendarme outside beckoned to Corentin.

'There is no horse in the stable,' he said in a low voice, when they stood on the threshold. Corentin went in again.

'You have sent your boy to town on horseback, I expect,' he remarked, 'so he will be back again before long.'

'No, sir,' said Marthe; 'he has gone on foot.'

'Well, then, what have you done with your horse?'

'Lent him,' Michu answered curtly.

'Come you here, my good apostle,' said Corentin, beckoning to the bailiff. 'I have a word or two to slip down your ear-tube.'

Corentin and Michu went out together

'That rifle that you were loading yesterday at four o'clock was meant to kill the State Councillor. Grévin saw you, but you cannot be nabbed for that; there was plenty of malice aforethought, but witnesses are scarce. You put Violette to sleep, I do not know how, and you and your wife and boy spent the night out of doors: first, to warn Mademoiselle Cinq-Cygne of our coming, and afterwards to rescue her cousins. You brought them back here, I do not know where as yet. Your boy and your wife brought down the corporal cleverly enough. In fact, you have beaten us. You are a famous, fine fellow. But the last word has not been said, and we shall not leave you to say it. Will you come to terms? Your masters will not be losers by it.'

'Come this way; we can talk without being overheard,' returned Michu; and he led the spy as far as the pond in the park. When Corentin saw the sheet of water, he looked Michu steadily in the eyes. Michu, no doubt, counted on his great physical strength to heave his companion into seven feet of mud below three feet of water. Michu looked back at him quite as steadily. Just so might some tawny-red Brazilian jaguar have gazed defiantly at a cold-blooded, flaccid boa-constrictor.

'I am not thirsty,' remarked Corentin. He stood on the edge of the meadow, and his hand travelled down into a side pocket for the little dagger.

'We cannot come to an understanding,' Michu remarked indifferently.

'Mind how you behave yourself, my dear fellow. Justice will keep an eye on you.'

'If Justice sees no better than you do, nobody is safe.'

'Do you refuse?' Corentin asked significantly.

'I would sooner have my throat cut a hundred times over, than have an understanding with such a rascal as you.'

Corentin stepped briskly into the chaise after scanning

Michu, the lodge, and Couraut, who barked after him. He left orders of some kind in Troyes and returned to Paris. Secret instructions and orders were issued to all the brigades of gendarmerie.

The search was kept up diligently and unremittingly in every little hamlet through the months of December, January, and February. Ears were listening in every little public house. Three important things Corentin discovered. A horse answering to the description of Michu's nag was found dead near Lagny. The five horses buried in the Forest of Nodesme had been sold for five hundred francs apiece by various farmers and millers to a man who evidently must have been Michu. When the law was passed against Georges's accomplices and those who harboured them, Corentin narrowed the police supervision to the Forest of Nodesme, and later, after the arrest of Pichegru and Moreau, the strange faces disappeared from the country-side.

By that time Michu had lost his place. The Arcis notary brought instructions in writing from State Councillor Malin (now a senator) authorizing Grévin to receive the bailiff's accounts, and to give him notice to quit. In three days' time Michu obtained his discharge in due form, and became his own master. To the no small astonishment of the country-side, he took up his abode at Cinq-Cygne, and managed the farms on all the reserves of the château for Laurence. The day of his installation was the fatal day of the Duc d'Enghien's execution. Almost all over France men heard simultaneously of the Prince's capture, trial, sentence, and death; the dreadful reprisals which preceded the trials of Polignac, Rivière, and Moreau.

II

CORENTIN'S REVENGE

A FARM-HOUSE was to be built for Michu, but in the meantime the so-called Judas was lodged in the outbuilding above the stables, close to the famous breach in the fosse. Michu bought two horses, one for himself and one for little François, for they, as well as Gothard, now went everywhere with Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne. People think nowadays that she used to take supplies to the four nobles, and to see that they wanted for nothing. François and Gothard, with Couraut and the Countess's hunting dogs, kept watch over the neighbourhood of the hiding-place, to make sure that there was nobody within range, while Laurence and Michu carried provisions prepared by Marthe and her mother to Catherine without the knowledge of the servants. The secret was known to very few persons, for not a soul could doubt that there were spies in the village.

So, from motives of prudence, this expedition was never made oftener than twice in a week, and always at different hours, sometimes in the daytime, sometimes at night; nor did Laurence and Michu relax their vigilance during the trials of Polignac, Rivière, and Moreau. When a decree of the Senate called the Bonaparte family to the Imperial dignity, and Napoleon's nomination as Emperor was submitted to the French people, M. d'Hauteserre gave his signature to the memorial presented to him by Goulard. At length it was known that the Pope would anoint and crown Napoleon; and thenceforth when it was proposed

that the Simeuses and the young d'Hauteserres should make petition to be struck off the List of *émigrés*, and to recover their citizens' rights, Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne made no objection.

Old d'Hauteserre hurried off to Paris forthwith, and obtained an interview with the *ci-devant* Marquis de Chargebœuf, a personal acquaintance of M. de Talleyrand's. The Prince de Talleyrand was then in favour; he undertook that the petition should reach Joséphine, and Joséphine laid it before her husband. Bonaparte was already called Emperor, Sire, and your Majesty, though the results of the ballot were not yet known. M. de Chargebœuf, M. d'Hauteserre, and the Abbé Goujet (who likewise had come to Paris) obtained audience of Talleyrand, and a promise of his support. Napoleon had already pardoned the principal actors in the great Royalist conspiracy against him, and the four gentlemen of the petition were merely suspected of complicity; yet when the Council of State rose, the Emperor summoned Malin, Fouché, Talleyrand, Cambacérès, Lebrun, and Dubois, the Prefect of Police, into his cabinet.

'Gentlemen,' began the future Emperor, still in the dress of the First Consul, 'gentlemen, we have received a memorial from the Sieurs de Simeuse and d'Hauteserre, officers in the Army of Condé, praying for an authorisation to return to France.'

'They are in France now,' said Fouché.

'So are hundreds of others that I come across in Paris,' remarked Talleyrand.

'You have never come across *these*, I think,' returned Malin, 'for they are in hiding in the Forest of Nodesme, and feel quite at home there.'

Malin was very careful not to inform either the First Consul or Fouché of those few words that had saved his life; but relying entirely upon Corentin's reports, he convinced the Council that the four nobles were implicated in

the Rivière and Polignac affair, and that Michu had been privy to it. His assertions were corroborated by the Prefect of Police.

'But how came this bailiff to know that the plot was discovered, when no one was in the secret save the Emperor, his councillors, and I myself?' asked Dubois, but nobody paid any attention to him.

'If they are in hiding in a forest and you have been looking for them for seven months,' said Napoleon, addressing Fouché, 'they have indeed expiated their sins!'

Malin was alarmed by Dubois's clearsightedness. 'They are my personal enemies,' he said; 'that is enough, I follow your Majesty's example; so I petition that their names may be struck off the list, and intercede with your Majesty for them.'

'They will be less dangerous for you as citizens than as *émigrés*,' observed Fouché, looking steadily at Malin; 'for they will take the oath to uphold the Constitution under the Empire and to obey the laws.'

'In what way are they dangerous to M. le Sénateur?" asked Napoleon.

The Prince de Talleyrand, on this, spoke for some time in a low voice with the future Emperor, and to all appearance the petition was granted; the MM. de Simeuse and d'Hauteserre were to be struck out from the List of *émigrés* and reinstated as citizens.

'Sire,' said Fouché, 'you may hear of them again.'

At the instance of the Duc de Grandlieu, Talleyrand had promised on behalf of the four young men, that on the honour of a noble — a formula which exerted a great influence over Napoleon — they would attempt nothing against the Emperor, and make their submission without reservation.

'The MM. d'Hauteserre and de Simeuse have no wish to bear arms against France after the recent events. They have not much sympathy with the Imperial Gov-

ernment; they are people whom your Majesty must win over; but they will be content to live as law-abiding citizens on French soil,' said the Minister. And he laid a letter expressing these views before Napoleon's eyes.

'Anything so outspoken must be sincere,' said the Emperor, glancing at Cambacérès and Lebrun. 'Have you any objections left?' he added, turning to Fouché.

'In your Majesty's interests, I ask permission to send these gentlemen the formal announcement of the erasure of their names,' replied the future Minister of Police, adding aloud, '*when it shall be definitely granted.*'

'So be it,' said Napoleon. He thought that Fouché looked dissatisfied.

So the little council broke up, and the affair apparently was not at an end; one result of it was that a vague suspicion was associated with the names of the exiles in Napoleon's memory.

M. d'Hauteserre, sure of success, had written home to tell the good news, and the inmates of Cinq-Cygne consequently were not surprised when Goulard came a few days later to bid Madame d'Hauteserre and Laurence send the exiles to Troyes, where the Prefect would take their oath of allegiance to the Empire and the laws, and hand over the decree which reinstated them in their civic rights. Laurence told the mayor that she would send notice to her cousins and the two d'Hauteserres.

'Then they are not here?' remarked Goulard.

Madame d'Hauteserre looked up with an anxious face as Laurence left the mayor and went to take counsel with Michu. Michu saw no objection to the immediate enlargement of the exiles; so Laurence, with the Michus and Gothard, rode out into the forest, taking an extra horse with them, for the Countess meant to accompany her cousins to Troyes, and afterwards home to the château. All the servants heard the good news, and were out

upon the lawn to watch the departure of the happy cavalcade.

The four young men left their hiding-place, mounted their horses without being seen, and took the road to Troyes, Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne riding with them. Michu, meanwhile, with Gothard and François to help him, blocked up the mouth of the cave, and the three returned on foot; but on the way it occurred to Michu that the spoons and forks and a silver goblet which his masters had in use had been forgotten. He went back alone to look for them.

He had reached the margin of the pool, when he heard voices in the hole, and went straight to the opening among the bushes.

'You have come back to look for your plate, no doubt!'

It was Peyrade's voice; it was Peyrade's big red face grinning at him through the leaves.

A sudden pang seemed to shoot through every joint in Michu's body, so intense was the vague, indefinite foreboding, the premonition of coming trouble; he could not account for it; the young Simeuses were in safety at last. He came forward, however, and met Corentin on the steps with a tallow dip in his hand.

'We are not spiteful,' said this person; 'we might have nabbed your *ci-devants* a week ago, but we knew their names were taken off the List. . . . You are an uncommonly knowing dog! And you gave us so much trouble that at least we must satisfy our curiosity.'

'I would give something to know for how much we were sold and who sold us,' cried Michu.

'If that tickles your curiosity so much, my boy,' said Peyrade, with a smile, 'look at your horses' shoes, and you will see that you have betrayed yourselves.'

'No malice,' added Corentin, beckoning the captain of gendarmes to come up with the horses.

'That miserable smith from Paris who shod horses so

well in the English fashion, and has left Cinq-Cygne since, was in their pay,' exclaimed Michu. 'They had only to send one of their people, disguised as a faggot-cutter or a poacher, to follow up the tracks of our horses when it was damp, after the man had put those nails in the shoes. We are quits.'

Michu pretty soon took comfort; he bethought himself that now, when the gentlemen were Frenchmen again and at liberty, the discovery of the hiding-place could do them no harm. And yet his forebodings were well founded. The police and the Jesuits have this virtue — they never forget their friends nor their enemies.

Old d'Hauteserre came back from Paris, and not a little surprised was he to find the good news arrived before him. Durieu made ready the most succulent of dinners. The servants wore their best clothes; the whole household waited impatiently for the exiles, and towards four o'clock they came home, joyful yet humiliated, for they were to be under the supervision of the police authorities for two years. The whole of that time they must be resident in the commune of Cinq-Cygne, while they were bound to report themselves every month at the prefecture.

'I will send you the register to sign,' the Prefect had said. 'Then in a few months' time you can make application for a remission of the conditions, which were imposed at the same time on all Pichegru's accomplices. I will support your demand.'

These restrictions, though well enough merited, had a little damped the young people's spirits. But Laurence burst out laughing.

'The Emperor of the French,' she said, 'was not very well brought up; he is not accustomed yet to pardon.'

When the party reached the iron gate, they found every one from the château there to meet them, as well as a goodly proportion of the folk from the village waiting upon the road to see the young nobles; for the fame of

their adventures filled the department. Madame d'Hauteserre held her sons for a long time in her arms; it was a tearful face that she turned upon them all; she could say nothing, and sat, overcome but happy, for a good while that evening.

As soon as the twin brothers appeared and dismounted, there was a general cry of surprise, so astonishingly alike were they, — the same expression, the same voice, the same tricks of manner. They rose in the saddle, flung a leg over the crupper, and threw back the bridle, to dismount as if by one accord; and seemed the more like a genuine pair of Ménechmes because they were dressed exactly alike. They wore boots *à la* Suwaroff, fitting closely over the instep; tight, white doeskin breeches, green shooting jackets with metal buttons, black cravats, and doeskin gloves. They were 'charming cavaliers,' as the saying went in those days, were these two young men of thirty-one. Of average height, but well set-up, they had shapely foreheads, dark hair, swarthy pale faces, and bright eyes, liquid as the eyes of children, beneath the fringe of long lashes. Their speech, gentle as a woman's, fell graciously from their shapely red lips. Their manners, finer and more polished than the manners of the country noblesse, showed that a knowledge of men and the world had been for them a second education, more important even than the first in the making of an accomplished gentleman.

Thanks to Michu they had never wanted money; they had been able to travel, they had been well received at foreign courts. Old M. d'Hauteserre and the abbé thought their manner somewhat lofty, but in their position this was perhaps the result of a lofty nature. And while in many little ways it was evident that they had received a careful education, they excelled also in all physical exercises.

The only difference that could be seen in them was a difference of temperament. The gayety of the younger was as charming as the tinge of melancholy in the older

brother; but even this contrast was one simply of mental attitude, and only perceptible after a long intimacy.

'Ah! my girl,' Michu said in Marthe's ear, 'how could one help being devoted to those two lads?'

And Marthe, looking with eyes of feminine and motherly admiration, gave her husband a charming little nod and squeezed his hand. The servants were permitted to embrace their new masters.

Many times during the seven months of hiding, the four gentlemen had walked abroad; it was a piece of necessary imprudence; and Michu, his son, and Gothard were always on the watch. During those walks, by the light of starlit nights, Laurence had connected the present with the past of their common life, and felt the impossibility of choosing between the brothers. An unselfish love for them both was equally strong in her. It seemed to her that she had two hearts. And Marie Paul and Paul Marie had not dared to speak of the now imminent rivalry. Perhaps, as yet, all three of them had left chance to decide; but Laurence evidently felt the position of their minds, for after an instant of visible hesitation she gave an arm to both brothers and went towards the salon, followed by Monsieur and Madame d'Hauteserre, who clung about their sons, plying them with questions. The servants sent up a shout of 'Long live the Cinq-Cygnes and the Simeuses!'

And Laurence, standing between the brothers, turned to thank them with a charming gesture.

When these nine people began to observe one another — for after every meeting even of members of the same family, the time comes when they all begin to notice the changes made by long absence — Adrien's first glance at Laurence made it clear to his mother and the abbé, who happened to see it, that the young man was in love with Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne. Adrien was the younger

d'Hauteserre. His nature was gentle and kindly, and in spite of the catastrophes that had tried the man, he had still a boy's heart. In this respect he was like a great many military men; a life of continual peril leaves no space for love; and the bashfulness that becomes youth so well, weighed upon the man of thirty. Adrien was a complete contrast to his brother, a rough-looking man, a mighty hunter and valorous soldier, resolute but heavy and matter-of-fact, lacking in mental quickness as in refinement of feeling. The life of the one was contemplative, that of the other active; yet both were men of honour according to their rank in life.

Yet Adrien d'Hauteserre, dark-haired, short, slight, and spare, gave the impression of great strength, while his tall, big, fair-haired brother looked like a weakling. Adrien was of nervous temperament; he possessed strength of soul, while his lymphatic brother Robert delighted in trials of muscular force. Interesting though it might be to inquire into the causes of a freak of nature not unfrequently seen in family histories, the fact can merely be touched upon here by way of explanation of the fact that Adrien had no rival to fear in his brother.

Robert's feeling toward Laurence was made up of a cousin's affection and a noble's respect for a young woman belonging to his own order. As for his manner of regarding women, Robert d'Hauteserre belonged to that section of mankind who hold that woman is a kind of appendage to man, and that the function of maternity is purely physical. They look for physical perfections in full measure, and count a woman as naught. To consider a woman as anything but a cipher socially, politically, and in the family, according to these authorities, would turn society upside down. In these days we have travelled so far from the views held by society in its primitive state, that even though a woman may not wish for the insidious liberty offered her by diverse new sects, she may well be scandalised

by such opinions; but Robert d'Hauteserre had the misfortune to hold them. Robert belonged to the Dark Ages; Adrien to the Nineteenth Century. These differences, so far from estranging the brothers, drew them more closely together. The curé, Mademoiselle Goujet, and Madame d'Hauteserre discerned and grasped the significance of the shades of character in the course of the evening over their game at boston. Even now they saw difficulties ahead.

At twenty-three years of age, after a life of solitary thought, after the anguish of the failure of a vast political project, Laurence became a woman again. She felt a great craving for affection; she brought all the charm of her mind into play; she was enchanting with the unconsciousness of a girl of fifteen; she showed how fascinating she could be in her tenderness. For the last thirteen years she had been a woman only through a woman's suffering. Now the lost years should be made good for her. She would show herself loving and coquettish, as hitherto she had been strong and great.

The four old people stayed on in the salon till every one else had gone, and shook their heads over this new phase in a charming maiden. What possibilities of passion might there not be in a girl of her temper and nobility? Both brothers loved the same woman equally well and equally blindly. Which of the two would Laurence choose? Would the other die of a broken heart?

Laurence was a countess in her own right. She would bring her husband a title, great privileges, an old illustrious name. Perhaps the Marquis de Simeuse, remembering this, would sacrifice himself for the sake of his brother, a poor and untitled younger son by the old law. But would the younger consent to accept the sacrifice of so great a happiness as the right of calling Laurence his wife? While they were at a distance, there were few drawbacks to the rivalry, and, moreover, the brothers' lives were so

often in danger, that the hazards of war might cut the knot at any time. But what might be looked for now that the three were together? Marie Paul and Paul Marie had reached an age when passion grows in strength by all the forces of a man's nature. Could they share their fair cousin's looks, glances, words, and attentions, and not break out into jealousy that might bring fearful results to pass? What would be the end of the pleasant life that they led together?

To these suggestions, brought up one by one over the last game of boston, Madame d'Hauteserre had her answer: she did not believe that Laurence would marry either of her cousins. In the course of the evening the old gentlewoman felt one of the inexplicable presentiments which remain a secret between mothers and God. And Laurence's conscience felt no less dismay over this *tête-à-tête* with her cousins. To the exciting drama of the plot, to the days when their lives were in danger, to the years of adversity and emigration, another drama had succeeded, a drama of which she had never thought. Her noble nature shrank from the abrupt measure of refusing both the twins; she was too honest a woman to marry another and to bear an irresistible passion in the depths of her heart. To remain unmarried, to weary out her cousins with delay, and then to take as her husband the one that loved her faithfully in spite of her caprices — this was a conclusion not so much deliberately chosen as dimly foreseen. As Laurence fell asleep she told herself that the wisest way was to leave fate to settle her affairs. In love, chance is a woman's providence.

Next morning Michu started for Paris, and a few days later returned with four fine horses for his new masters. The shooting would begin in six weeks' time; and the young Countess thought, not without reason, that sport with its absorbing interests would provide relief from the difficulties of the *tête-à-tête* at the château. The first result was quite unexpected; it surprised the onlookers at

this strange love-affair while it roused their admiration. Without any deliberate agreement, the two brothers vied with each other in affectionate attentions; they seemed to find satisfaction in these pleasures of the soul. They were as fraternal with Laurence as with each other. Nothing more natural. After so long an absence they both felt that they must learn to know their cousin, and give her time to know them both, while they left her free to make her choice. The affection that made but one life of two lives sustained them through this ordeal. Love even as motherhood seemed as if it could know no distinction between the brothers. Laurence was obliged to give them different cravats to know them, a white one for the elder and black for the younger. But for this complete resemblance, this identity of life which deceived all beholders, such a situation would seem, and rightly seem, impossible. It is, in fact, inexplicable until it happens; it is one of those things that nobody can believe until they see it, and once seen, it requires even more mental effort to explain it than to believe it.

If Laurence spoke, her voice vibrated in the same fashion through two hearts, both alike loving and true. If she said anything ingenious or amusing her eyes met a glad response in other eyes that followed her every movement and interpreted her lightest wish; eyes that always smiled on her with a new expression of gayety or of tender melancholy.

Where the woman they loved was concerned, both the brothers showed that wonderful spontaneous impulse of heart and action in harmony with the impulse, which, according to the Abbé Goujet, reached the sublime. Often, for instance, if something was sought for, or if there was a question of one of the little services that a man is eager to perform for the woman he loves, the elder brother would yield to the younger with a half-proud, half-pathetic glance at his cousin; and the younger made it a point of honour to repay debts of this kind.

This generous rivalry in a sentiment which sometimes reduces a man to the jealous ferocity of the brute, completely confused the ideas of the old people who were watching them.

Little things like these often brought the tears into Laurence's eyes. Perhaps it is possible to give an idea of her feelings, by recalling an experience that makes an immense impression upon more highly endowed organisations, — the memory of two beautiful voices singing together in perfect harmony. When Sontag and Malibran, for instance, sing in a duet, and that instrument, the human voice, is controlled by the genius of a great executant, then the two parts are blended in a single melody, and it is as if the sighs of one impassioned being were borne in upon the soul. Sometimes the Marquis de Simeuse, from the depths of a great arm-chair, would turn his intent melancholy gaze upon the younger brother, who was laughing and talking with Laurence; and to the curé, watching him, it seemed, at such times, that this was a man capable of some great act of self-sacrifice. And then again, before long, he caught the gleam of unconquerable passion in the Marquis's eyes. If either of the brothers chanced to be with Laurence, he might easily believe that he alone was loved.

'It seems to me when one is away, that they are but one,' said the Countess, when the abbé questioned her as to her feelings. And then the abbé knew that coquetry was utterly lacking in Laurence. She could not realise that two men loved her.

'But, my dear little girl, you really must make up your mind sometime,' Madame d'Hauteserre remonstrated one evening, — Madame d'Hauteserre, whose son was silently dying of love for Laurence.

'Let us be happy!' the girl answered. 'God will save us from ourselves.'

Adrien d'Hauteserre locked his gnawing jealousy into

the depths of his heart, and kept his pain to himself. He knew how little hope there was for him. He was content to watch this charming girl, and indeed, during those months of suspense, Laurence shone radiantly. She had grown bewitching, she took all the pains to please that a woman takes when she is loved. She followed the fashions. More than once she made a hasty journey to Paris to appear lovelier than before in new clothes or finery. And, finally, she would give her cousins even the least pleasures of that sense of being at home to which they had so long been strangers, and, in spite of loud outcries from her guardian, she turned the château into the most comfortable place of residence in Champagne at that time.

Robert d'Hauteserre understood nothing of all this drama beneath the surface. He did not see that his brother loved Laurence. He liked to rally his cousin on her coquetry, for he confused that detestable defect with a desire to please; but Robert was equally obtuse in all matters of taste and feeling and culture. So when the representative of the Dark Ages appeared upon the scene, Laurence at once made him take the part of clown in the play. Nor did he suspect this. She amused her cousins by drawing Robert into a discussion, and leading him on insidiously till he floundered into the marsh where dulness and ignorance sink deeper at every step. She excelled in the ingenious mystifications which, to be perfect, must leave the victim quite satisfied with himself. And yet, during those pleasant days, the one really happy period in the lives of the three charming young people, Robert, coarse though his nature was, never interfered between the Simeuses and Laurence, with some virile, trenchant word which might have decided the question. The sincerity of the brothers impressed him. And he guessed, no doubt, that a woman might hesitate before showing a sign of preference for the one, when the other must be

pained by it; when one brother was made happy at the expense of the other. This forbearance on Robert's part is an admirable comment upon a situation, which would certainly have been a case referred to the higher powers, in the ages of faith when the sovereign pontiff had power to intervene to cut the Gordian knot in so phenomenal a conjuncture, so well-nigh inscrutable a mystery. The Revolution had disciplined the three in the Catholic faith, and religion increased the gravity of the crisis; for it is greatness of character that makes a great situation, and neither Monsieur nor Madame d'Hauteserre nor the Goujets looked for anything common or mean from Laurence or the Simeuses.

The drama was a secret kept within the family circle. So absorbed were they all in watching its slow yet swift progress, the succession of unlooked-for joys, little contests, fallacious preferences, disappointments, cruel suspense, explanations delayed till the morrow, and mute declarations of love, that the coronation of Napoleon passed quite unheeded by the inmates of Cinq-Cygne. And besides, they had found a truce from passion in the strenuous pleasures of the chase. Excessive physical fatigue prevented perilous excursions into the wide fields of dreamland. Neither Laurence nor her cousins gave a thought to politics; every day had palpitating interests of its own.

'Really,' Mademoiselle Goujet remarked one evening, 'of all these lovers I cannot tell which loves the best!'

Adrien happened to be in the room with the boston players; he looked up at the words and the colour died out of his face. Lately it had only been the joy of seeing Laurence and of hearing her voice that bound him to life.

'In my opinion,' said the curé, 'the Countess, as a woman, loves with much less reserve.'

A few minutes later Laurence came in with the two Simeuses and Robert d'Hauteserre. The newspapers had just arrived. Now that conspiracies had failed at home,

England, plotting abroad, was bringing Europe into a league against France. The Emperor had meant to repay France for his election by the ruin of the English power, but the disastrous battle of Trafalgar overturned the most tremendous schemes ever planned by human genius. The camp at Boulogne was broken up. Napoleon's armies, inferior as always in point of numbers, were about to give battle to Europe on new ground. The whole world was wondering what the result of the campaign would be.

'Oh! this time he will be beaten,' said Robert, when he had read the newspaper through.

'He has all Russia and Austria on his hands,' remarked Marie Paul.

'He has never manœuvred troops in Germany,' added Paul Marie.

'Of whom are you speaking?' asked Laurence.

'Of the Emperor,' replied all three.

Laurence gave her lovers a disdainful glance that left them crestfallen, while it sent Adrien into a rapture of joy. The slighted suitor made a gesture of admiration; the proud look on his face said plainly enough that he had no thoughts now save for Laurence.

'So, you see, love has made him forget his hate,' the Abbé Goujet said, in a low voice.

This was the first, the last, and only reproach that the brothers incurred, but at that moment they were convicted of an inferiority in love compared with their cousin Laurence, who only heard the wonderful tidings of Austerlitz two months afterwards, through an argument between old d'Hauteserre and his sons. For old M. d'Hauteserre, consistent in his schemes, wished his boys to ask to serve under the Emperor; they would, no doubt, take their rank on entering the service, and a chance of a splendid career was still open to them. But the pure Royalist party was the stronger at Cinq-Cygne. Laurence and the four younger men laughed at the prudent old man, who seemed to scent

coming misfortune. Possibly prudence is not so much a virtue as a kind of intellectual *sense*, if it be possible to put those words together; but the day will surely come when physiologists and philosophers will admit that the senses are, in a manner, the sheath of a vivid and penetrating projection of the intelligence.

After the conclusion of peace between France and Austria toward the end of February, 1806, a relative of the families came over to Cinq-Cygne. This was the *ci-devant* Marquis de Chargebœuf, owner of an estate in the Seine-et-Marne with outlying lands in the Aube. The Marquis had exerted himself on behalf of his relatives at the time of the application to be taken off the List of *émigrés;* at a later time he was to give them further proof of his attachment. The family at the château were breakfasting when the Marquis arrived in a kind of calèche derisively called a *berlingot* in those days. They burst into a fit of laughter as the shabby carriage came along the narrow, paved road; but when the old man's bald head was thrust out from between the leather curtains, M. d'Hauteserre exclaimed that it was the Marquis de Chargebœuf; and they all rose from the table to pay their respects to the head of the house.

'We are to blame for allowing our relative to be beforehand with us,' said the Marquis de Simeuse, addressing his brother and the d'Hauteserres. 'We ought to go out to thank him.'

The servant on the box-seat, a man in ordinary peasant's dress, stuck a waggoner's whip into a cumbrous leather tube, and went round to assist the Marquis to alight; but Adrien and the younger Simeuse were there before him. They undid the brass handles of the door, and helped him to descend, in spite of protests. The Marquis was wont to maintain that his yellow *berlingot* with its leather door was an excellent and commodious vehicle. Meanwhile the servant with Gothard's help had unharnessed

the horses, — a pair of heavy, sturdy beasts with sleek hind quarters, equally accustomed, no doubt, to work on the land or on the road.

'In spite of the cold? Why, you show the prowess of a knight of ancient days,' said Laurence, leading her aged relative into the salon.

'It is not your place to come to see an old fogy like me,' he said, — a delicate way of insinuating a reproach.

'What brings him here?' old d'Hauteserre privately wondered.

M. de Chargebœuf, a neat, little, elderly gentleman of sixty-seven, wore powder, pigeon's wings, and a bag-wig. His thin legs were encased in ribbed stockings and light-coloured small-clothes; his green cloth shooting-coat was adorned with gold buttons and frogs, and his white waistcoat was dazzling with its portentous quantity of gold embroidery. A costume still worn in 1805 by elderly people harmonised well with a countenance not unlike that of the great Frederick. The Marquis never wore his cocked hat for fear of disturbing the *demi-lune* of powder on his head. He leant his right hand on a hooked walking-cane, holding both hat and cane in a manner worthy of *le Grand Monarque.*

This worthy gentleman divested himself of a wadded silk gown, and sank into the depths of an easy-chair. His cane and cocked hat he held between his knees. None but the *roués* of the court of Louis Quinze ever possessed the secret of the attitude which left the hands free to toy with the snuff-box, always a valuable trinket. And, in fact, the Marquis now produced a very handsome snuff-box from a waistcoat pocket closed by a flap covered with gold scroll-work; and while he offered snuff with a gracious gesture and benign expression, and prepared a pinch, he had time to see, in the first place, that his visit gave his relatives genuine pleasure, and in the second, to understand why the *émigrés* had been remiss. 'When people

make love, they forget to pay visits,' his face seemed to say.

'We are going to keep you for a few days, are we not?' said Laurence.

'That is quite out of the question,' returned he. 'If we were not so kept apart by events — for you have made longer journeys than the distance between our houses, dear child — you would know that I have daughters and daughters-in-law and granddaughters and grandchildren; and they would all be anxious if they did not see me to-night. I have more than forty miles to drive.'

'You have very good horses,' said the Marquis de Simeuse.

'Oh! I have only come from Troyes; I was there yesterday on business.'

Then followed inquiries after the family, the Marquise de Chargebœuf, and matters really indifferent, in which courtesy requires us to take a lively interest. It seemed to M. d'Hauteserre that M. de Chargebœuf's object in coming had been to recommend his relatives to commit no imprudences. The times were very much changed, so the Marquis took occasion to say, and nobody could tell now what the Emperor might become.

'Oh! he will be a god,' said Laurence.

Then the good Marquis talked of making concessions. And M. d'Hauteserre, hearing him discourse on the necessity of submission, with far more authority and conviction than he himself ever put into his doctrine, looked almost imploringly at his offspring.

'Would you serve that man?' asked the Marquis de Simeuse.

'Why, yes, if the interests of my family required it.'

At last the Marquis began to hint vaguely at distant dangers; and, when Laurence asked him to explain himself, strongly recommended the young men to give up hunting and to keep quietly at home.

'You always think of the lands of Gondreville as your own,' he said, turning to the Simeuses; 'that is the way to stir up danger. I can see by your astonishment that you have no idea that there are those in Troyes who bear you ill-will; your courage has not been forgotten there. Nobody scruples to tell how you baffled the police; some praise you, some say you are the Emperor's enemies, and a few fanatics here and there are amazed at the Emperor's clemency in your case. But this is nothing. You have outwitted persons that thought themselves more than a match for you, and low people never forgive. Now all the judicial appointments in the department are, more or less, made by your enemy Malin; he has put his creatures in every post, even on the staff of prosecuting counsel; and, sooner or later, his judicial functionaries will be uncommonly well pleased to find you implicated in some delicate business. Some peasant or other will pick a quarrel with you for trespassing over his field, you will be out with loaded guns, you have quick tempers, misfortunes may easily happen. People in your position must be in the right a hundred times over if they are not to be in the wrong. I do not say this unadvisedly. Your arrondissement is still under police supervision; a commissary is maintained in that little hole of a place, Arcis, on purpose to protect a member of the Imperial Senate from your designs on his life. He is afraid of you. And he says so.'

'But it is a slander!' cried the younger brother.

'A slander! I myself think so. . . . But what does the public think? That is the important point. Michu once lay in wait for Malin. Malin has not forgotten it. Since your return, the Countess has taken Michu into her service. And so a good many people, most people in fact, think that Malin is right. You do not realise how very delicate the position is, when an *émigré* is brought in contact with the new owner of his estates. The Prefect, an intelligent man, just let fall a word or two about you yes-

terday, and I felt uneasy. In short I would rather not see you here——'

The Marquis's reply was received with the utmost amazement. Marie Paul rang energetically.

'Gothard,' he said, when the little fellow came, 'go and fetch Michu.'

It was not long before the ex-bailiff of Gondreville appeared.

'Michu, my friend,' began the Marquis de Simeuse, 'is it true that you tried to kill Malin?'

'Yes, my lord Marquis. And when he comes back I will lie in wait for him again——'

'Do you know that we are suspected of setting you to watch for him? That our cousin, as she took you for her tenant, is accused of complicity in a plot against his life?'

'Good gracious!' cried Michu. 'There must be a curse hanging over me. Am I never to rid you quietly of Malin?'

'No, no, my boy,' said Paul Marie. 'You must leave our service and the neighbourhood. We will watch over your interests and put you in the way of prospering. Sell all that you have here, realise everything, and we will send you to Trieste. We have a friend there who has very large business connections; you will be very useful to him, until things improve here for us all.'

The tears came into Michu's eyes; he stood glued to the spot on the polished floor.

'Did any one see you when you lay in wait for Malin?' asked the Marquis de Chargebœuf.

'Grévin, the notary, was talking with him, or I should have shot him, and very lucky it was that I did not, as Madame la Comtesse knows,' he added, looking at his mistress.

The Marquis de Chargebœuf seemed to be put out by all this questioning, although it was conducted by the family

among themselves. 'Is this Grévin the only person who knows of it?' he asked.

'That spy who came down at the time to trap the masters knew about it too.'

M. Chargebœuf got up and went to the window, as if he were interested in the gardens.

'You have made great improvements here at Cinq-Cygne, have you not?' he said; and he went out, followed by Laurence and the Simeuses, who understood the meaning of the inquiry.

Outside, the old noble turned to them.

'You are open-natured and generous,' he said, 'but rash as ever. I give you warning of a rumour, *which must be a slander*, nothing more natural; and you proceed to prove that it is well founded before weak-minded folk like Monsieur and Madame d'Hauteserre and their sons.—Oh! you young people! you young people!—You should leave Michu here,' he continued; 'it is you, *you* who ought to go! But at any rate, if you stop in the neighbourhood, write a few lines to the Senator, tell him that you have just heard through me of the rumours current about your servant, and that he has had notice given him.'

'*We!*' cried the brothers. 'Are we to write to Malin who murdered our father and mother, and impudently robbed us of our estates?'

'That is all true; but he is one of the greatest personages at the Imperial court, and a king in the Aube.'

'Malin that voted for the King's death if the Army of Condé should enter France, and otherwise for perpetual imprisonment!' exclaimed Laurence.

'And probably advised the death of the Duc d'Enghien,' exclaimed Paul Marie.

'Oh! well, if you have a mind to recapitulate all his titles to nobility,' exclaimed the Marquis, 'say that he pulled down Robespierre by the skirts of his coat as soon as he saw that the majority were for getting rid of Robes-

pierre; he would have had Bonaparte taken out and shot if the 18th Brumaire had failed; he would bring back the Bourbons if Napoleon should totter. The strongest will always find Malin at his side, with a sword or a pistol ready so that he can rid himself at once of any formidable antagonist! — But so much the more reason.'

'We are sinking very low,' said Laurence.

The old Marquis led them further away to a strip of grass-plot covered with a light sprinkling of snow.

'Ah! you children, you will fly into indignation when you hear a wise man's advice; but it is my duty to give it. This is what I should do. I would take some old gentleman (like myself, for instance) as mediator. I would authorise him to make Malin an offer — a million of francs for a ratification of the sale of Gondreville. . . . Oh! keep the thing quiet, he would agree to it. Then as the funds stand now you would have a hundred thousand francs per annum, you could buy a fine estate somewhere else in France, leave M. d'Hauteserre as steward of Cinq-Cygne, and pull straws to decide which of you shall marry our fair heiress here. But an old man's talk in young ears is like young people's talk for old folk — sound with no meaning in it.'

He signified that he wished to hear no reply and returned to the salon, the Abbé Goujet and his sister having meantime arrived. The Simeuses were indignant at the proposal that they should pull straws for their cousin, and Laurence was, so to speak, disgusted by the unpalatable remedy pointed out by their relative. The three were courteous, but less gracious than before. Affection had received a shock. M. de Chargebœuf felt the coolness, he looked again and again at the three charming faces, and his eyes were full of compassion. The conversation became general, but he still talked of the necessity of accepting the situation, and vaunted M. d'Hauteserre's persistent wish, to see his sons in the Emperor's army.

'Bonaparte creates dukes,' he said, 'and fiefs of the Empire; some day he will create counts. Malin would like to be Comte de Gondreville.—There is an idea which you may find useful,' he added, looking as he spoke at the Simeuses.

'Or disastrous,' said Laurence.

The horses were put in, the Marquis rose at once to go, followed by the whole family. He beckoned to Laurence when he was seated; she sprang, light as a bird, to the carriage step.

'You are not an ordinary woman,' he said, lowering his voice for her ear; 'you should understand me. Malin cannot let you alone; his conscience is uneasy; he will lay some sort of trap for you. Whatever you do, be very careful even of your slightest actions. Compound the matter, in short, that is my last word to you.'

The brothers stood passive and motionless beside Laurence on the lawn, watching the *berlingot* as it turned through the gate and rolled away on the road to Troyes; Laurence had repeated the old gentleman's last words to them. It is always a mistake on the part of age and experience to come upon the scene in a *berlingot*, with a pair of striped stockings and a bag-wig. Not one of the three young creatures could conceive the changes that were taking place in France. Every nerve in them was quivering with indignation; honour like their noble blood was boiling in their veins.

'And he is the head of the Chargebœufs!' said the Marquis de Simeuse, 'a man with the words *Adsit fortior* for his motto, one of the grandest of all war-cries!'

'There is only the *bœuf* left; it is a bovine metamorphosis,' said Laurence, with a bitter smile.

'The age of St Louis is past!' cried the younger of the Simeuses.

'"To DIE SINGING!"' Laurence exclaimed. 'The cry of the five maids who founded our house shall be mine!'

'And our motto is CY MEURS. So no surrender,' added the elder brother, 'for when you come to think over it our relative the Ox ruminated very sagaciously over what he came to say to us. Gondreville will sooner or later be Malin's name.'

'And residence!' exclaimed Marie Paul.

'Mansard designed it for nobles, and the people would bring up their broods in it,' said his brother.

'If it is to be so, I would rather see Gondreville burnt,' Laurence burst out.

A man from the village had come to take a look at a calf that old d'Hauteserre was selling him; he came out of the cow shed at that moment and heard the words.

'Let us go back to the house,' said Laurence, with a smile; 'a little more and we should have done something imprudent, and made good the prophecy of the Ox, over a bargain for a calf."

'Michu, my poor fellow, I had forgotten about your prank,' she said, as she returned to the salon; 'but we are not in the odour of sanctity hereabouts, so do not get us into trouble. Have you any other peccadillo on your conscience?'

'I am sorry that I did not kill my old master's murderer before I hurried to the rescue of my present masters.'

'Michu!' cried the curé.

'But I am not going to leave the neighbourhood until I know that you are safe,' he continued, taking no notice of the exclamation. 'I see fellows prowling about and I don't altogether like the looks of them. The last time that we were out shooting in the forest, that gamekeeper kind of fellow that they have taken on in my place at Gondreville came up to me and asked me if we thought we were at home there. "Ah! my boy," I told him, "it is not easy to break yourself of a habit in two months when it is a thing that has been done for two hundred years."'

'You are in the wrong, Michu,' said the Marquis de Simeuse, with a pleased smile.

'What did he say?' asked M. d'Hauteserre.

'He said that he should let the Senator know of our pretensions.'

'The Comte de Gondreville!' cried the elder Simeuse. 'Ah! a fine farce! By the by, they say "your Majesty" to Bonaparte.'

'And "your Highness" to my lord the Grand Duke of Berg,' added the curé.

'Who may he be?' asked M. de Simeuse.

'Murat, Napoleon's brother-in-law,' said old d'Hauteserre.

'Good!' was Laurence's comment. 'And do they say "your Majesty" to the Marquis de Beauharnais's widow?'

'Yes, Mademoiselle.'

'We ought to go to Paris to see all this!' cried Laurence.

'Alas, Mademoiselle,' said Michu, 'I went to Paris to take François to school, and upon my word there is no trying on any nonsense with the Imperial Guard, as they call them. If the whole army is cut out on that pattern, it may last our time and longer.'

'They talk of noble families that are entering the service,' said M. d'Hauteserre.

'And as the law stands at present, your children will be bound to serve,' rejoined the curé.

'The law recognises no distinctions of rank or name, now.'

'That man is doing us more damage with his court, than the Revolution did with the axe!' exclaimed Laurence.

'The Church prays for him,' put in the curé.

All these things that were said, one after another, were like so many commentaries on the old Marquis de Chargebœuf's wise words; but the young people had too much confidence, too strong a sense of honour to accept a compromise. They said among themselves what every defeated party has said since the world began, to wit, that

there would be an end of the prosperity of the victorious side. The Emperor was kept in his place entirely by the army; sooner or later the right would triumph, and so forth, and so forth; and thus, in spite of warnings, they fell into the pit that was digged before them, while prudent and docile folk, like old d'Hauteserre, would have avoided it. If people would be honest, they would perhaps admit that misfortunes never burst upon them without some warning beforehand, either from without or within; but there are many who only recognise the profound significance of the portent, mysterious or otherwise, after the calamity has befallen them.

'In any case, Madame la Comtesse knows that I cannot leave the place until I have sent in my accounts,' Michu whispered to Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne.

For all answer she gave him a look, and he went. Michu sold his land at once to Beauvisage, the tenant of Bellache, but he could not receive payment for nearly three weeks. Laurence, meanwhile, had told her cousins of their fortune hidden in the forest; and so, just a month after the Marquis's visit, she suggested that they should unearth the hoard on the mid-Lent holiday. But for heavy falls of snow, it would have been dug up before; but Michu was better pleased that his masters should be present on the occasion. He had quite made up his mind to leave the place; he could not trust himself.

'Malin has come down to Gondreville quite suddenly, no one knows why,' he told his mistress; 'and the thought of having Gondreville put up for sale in consequence of the owner's decease, would be too much for me. I feel like a guilty man, when I do not act on the inspiration.'

'What can have induced him to leave Paris in the depth of winter?'

'All Arcis is talking about it,' said Michu; 'he left his family in Paris and brought down no one but his own man. M. Grévin, the Arcis notary, and Madame Marion, the

receiver-general's wife (sister-in-law of the other Marion, Malin's stalking-horse), are keeping him company.'

Laurence thought the mid-Lent holiday a capital day for their purpose, for it gave her an excuse for ridding herself of the servants. The masqueraders in the town attracted the peasants; and no one would be working in the fields. But as so often happens in criminal affairs, it was precisely the choice of the day that helped to bring about the disaster. Fate was as ingenious in her calculations as Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne. The young people held a council, decided that Monsieur and Madame d'Hauteserre would be so anxious if they knew that a hoard of eleven hundred thousand francs in gold was buried on the outskirts of a forest, that they concluded to spare them the knowledge. The young d'Hauteserres, consulted on the point, were of the same opinion. The secret of the expedition was confined to the four nobles, Gothard, Michu, and Laurence herself.

After much calculation it seemed possible that each horse could carry a load of forty-eight thousand francs in a long bag over the crupper. Three journeys would be enough. It was agreed that the servants' curiosity might prove dangerous, so they were all sent off to Troyes to see the mid-Lent rejoicings. Catherine, Marthe, and Durieu, who might be trusted, stayed at the château. The servants very willingly accepted their holiday and went before daybreak. Gothard, with Michu's help, rubbed down the horses and saddled them early in the morning; the cavalcade went round by way of the gardens, and there they started for the forest. They were just mounting (for the park gate was so low that every one had gone in on foot, each leading his horse) when old Beauvisage, the tenant of Bellache, came by.

'Hullo!' cried Gothard; 'here comes somebody——'

'Oh, it is I!' said the honest farmer, coming out upon them. 'Good day, gentlemen. So you are going a-hunting in spite of the Prefect's orders. I am not one to com-

plain, but take care! If you have friends you have plenty of enemies.'

'Aha!' returned the burly d'Hauteserre, with a smile. 'God send success to our hunting, and you shall have your masters back again.'

At these words, on which events were to put a very different construction, Laurence looked sternly at Robert. The Marquis de Simeuse imagined that Malin would give up Gondreville if the purchase-money was returned to him. The Marquis de Chargebœuf had advised the exactly opposite course. Robert, sharing the young people's hopes, had them in his mind when he uttered these fatal words.

'In any case, mum is the word, old boy,' Michu said to Beauvisage, as he took the key and followed the others.

It was one of those bright days toward the end of March, when there is no dampness in the air; when the ground is dry, the weather cloudless, and the warmth seems curiously at variance with the leafless trees. So mild was the weather that there were patches of green here and there in the country as they went.

'We are setting out to look for treasure, and all the while you are the real prize of our house, cousin,' laughed the elder of the Simeuses. Laurence went at a footpace ahead of the others, with a cousin on either side. The two d'Hauteserres came next, and Michu brought up the rear. Gothard had been sent on in front to look out along the way.

'If our fortune, a part of it at least, is to be found again, marry my brother,' said the younger of the twins in a low voice. 'He idolises you; you would be as rich as the nobles of these days are obliged to be.'

'No. Leave the money to him, and I will marry you, since I am rich enough for two,' returned she.

'So let it be!' cried the Marquis de Simeuse. 'And I will go to find a wife worthy to be your sister.'

'Then you love me less than I thought,' said Laurence, looking at him jealously.

'No; I love you both more than you love me,' retorted the Marquis.

'And for that reason you would sacrifice yourself?' asked Laurence, with eyes full of the momentary preference. The Marquis made no reply. His silence drew an impatient gesture from her.

'Very well,' she said; 'in that case I should think of you always, and my husband would find that intolerable.'

'How could I live without you?' exclaimed the younger brother, looking at the older.

'Still, you cannot take us both,' said the Marquis. 'And it is time to make a decision,' he added, his tone abrupt with deep feeling. And he pushed on ahead lest the d'Hauteserres should hear. His companions' horses followed. When they had put a reasonable interval between themselves and the rest of the party, Laurence tried to speak, but at first tears came and no words.

'I will go into a convent,' she said at last.

'And be the last of the Cinq-Cygnes?' asked the younger Simeuse. 'Then instead of one unhappy man who consents to his lot, you would have two? Nay. The one who can only be a brother to you will resign himself to his fate. When we knew that we were not to be so poor as we thought, we had an explanation,' he added, looking at the Marquis. 'If I am preferred, this fortune of ours goes to my brother. If I am the unhappy one, he will make over the fortune to me, and the title as well, for he will be the Comte de Cinq-Cygne. Whichever way it happens, the unlucky brother will have a chance of an establishment. And finally, if he feels that he is heartbroken, he will go into the army to be killed without casting a shadow on the other two.'

'We are true knights of the Middle Ages; we are worthy of our sires!' cried Paul Marie. 'Decide, Laurence!'

'We cannot go on like this any longer,' added the younger.

'And, Laurence,' added the elder, 'do not think that there will be no luxury in self-sacrifice.'

'My two dearly loved ones, I cannot decide. I love you both as if you were but one; as you loved your mother. God will help us. I shall not make the choice. We will leave chance to decide, and I have one condition to make.'

'What is it?'

'That the one that shall be my brother afterwards shall stay till I give him leave to go. I wish to be the sole judge of the expediency of his going.'

The brothers agreed to this, though they did not understand what was in her mind.

'The first to whom Madame d'Hauteserre shall address a word to-night at dinner, after the *Benedicite*, shall be my husband,' continued Laurence. 'But there must be no tricks; none of you are to prompt her to ask a question.'

'We will play fairly,' said Marie Paul, and they kissed Laurence's hand. The decision would soon be made; each of the brothers could believe that it would be in his favour, and their spirits rose high.

'However it is, Laurence dear, you will make a Comte de Cinq-Cygne,' said the elder.

'And in our game the one who wins will lose his name,' added the younger Simeuse.

'I think, at this rate, that Madame la Comtesse will be a bride before long,' said Michu, behind the d'Hauteserres. 'The masters are in great spirits. If my mistress makes her choice, I shall stay on. I want to see that wedding.'

Neither of the d'Hauteserres answered a word. Quite suddenly a single magpie lighted down between the d'Hauteserres and Michu. Like all children of the soil, Michu was superstitious; it seemed to him that he heard the death-bell tolling. But for the other three the day began gayly enough; when lovers go together through a

wood they very seldom see magpies. Michu had brought his map, and found the spot; each of the gentlemen was provided with a pick, and the money was unearthed. The hiding-place was in a lonely spot in the forest, far from any path or human dwelling, and the cavalcade met no one, which was unfortunate; for, grown bold with success, they took a short cut on the journey for the last two hundred thousand francs. The road went past the highest point of the forest, from which you could see the park at Gondreville.

'There is a fire!' exclaimed Laurence, seeing a column of bluish smoke.

'A bonfire somewhere or other,' said Michu.

Laurence knew every track and path in the woods; she left the party and rode at full gallop to the Cinq-Cygne lodge, Michu's old home. The house was empty and shut up, but the gate stood open, and Laurence noticed at once the tracks of several horses. The smoke was rising from a grassy space in the 'English park.' They must be burning weeds, she thought.

'Ah! you are in it too, mademoiselle!' cried a voice. It was Violette. The man had come at a gallop down the way from the park, and now pulled up at the sight of Laurence. 'But it is only a carnival joke, isn't it? They are not going to kill him, are they?'

'Whom?'

'Your cousins don't mean to kill him.'

'Kill? Whom?'

'The Senator.'

'You are mad, Violette!'

'Well then, what are you doing here?' retorted he. But at the first mention of danger for her cousins, the gallant girl turned and rode back at full speed, and reached the spot just as the last loads were ready.

'Look out! Something is happening, I don't know what. But let us go back to Cinq-Cygne.'

While they had been busy unearthing the fortune saved

by the late Marquis, a strange scene had taken place at the château de Gondreville.

At half-past two that afternoon the Senator and his friend Grévin were playing a game of chess beside the fire in the great salon on the ground floor. Madame Marion and Madame Grévin were chatting together on a sofa drawn up to the fireside. The servants had all gone over to Troyes to see a curious masquerade long advertised in the arrondissement. The keeper, Michu's successor at the Cinq-Cygne lodge, had likewise gone with his family. The only people in the château, beside the group in the salon, were the Senator's own man and Violette. The gate-keeper and a couple of gardeners were at their posts, but the lodge stood at the entrance to the drive at the further end of the Arcis avenue, at such a distance that you could not hear a shot fired at the château. On this particular afternoon, moreover, the folk were all on the other side of the house, watching on the threshold in the hope of seeing the mummers come from Arcis, more than a mile away.

Violette was waiting in the great entrance hall for an interview with the Senator and Grévin as to the renewal of his lease, when five men, wearing masks and gloves, burst in upon Violette and the man-servant, gagged them with pocket-handkerchiefs, and tied them down to two chairs in the pantry. Four of the intruders resembled the MM. d'Hauteserre and Simeuse in figure, manners, and gait; the fifth man was like Michu. Quick as they had been about their work, both the victims continued to cry out, and the cry was heard by the party in the drawing-room. The women insisted that it was a cry of alarm.

'Listen!' exclaimed Madame Grévin; 'there are thieves in the house!'

'Pooh, some carnival cry,' said Grévin; 'the mummers are coming to the château.'

The dispute gave the five masked intruders time to shut

the gates on the side of the great courtyard, and to lock Violette and the man-servant into the pantry. Madame Grévin, a tolerably self-willed lady, persisted in going out to learn the cause of the sound. She fell in with the five masks, and met with the fate of Violette and the man-servant. This done, they burst into the salon, the two strongest grappled with the Comte de Gondreville, gagged him and hurried him off across the park, while the other three, having gagged Madame Marion and the notary, bound them down, each in an arm-chair. The whole thing was over and done in less than half an hour. The two came back to join the others, and then began a thorough search through the château from garret to cellar. Not a single lock was picked, but every cupboard was opened, and every wall was sounded; the place was at their mercy, in short, till five o'clock that evening. About that time the man-servant succeeded in gnawing through the cords that bound Violette. Violette, now ungagged, raised the alarm. At the sound of his shouts the five strangers made off across the gardens, mounted horses like those ridden by the Cinq-Cygnes, and escaped, but not so nimbly but that Violette saw them. Violette unbound the man-servant and left him to look after the women and the notary, while he himself bestrode his nag and rode off after the miscreants. When he reached the Cinq-Cygne lodge, to his unspeakable amazement he saw the gate standing wide open, and Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne, as he supposed, on sentry duty.

The young Countess was away out of sight when Grévin rode up with the rural policeman of the commune of Gondreville, the gate-keeper having found him a mount in the stables, while the gate-keeper's wife went to give notice to the gendarmerie at Arcis. Violette forthwith spoke to Grévin of his meeting with Laurence, and her flight; the depth and decision of that fearless young woman's character was known to them both.

'She was on the lookout,' added Violette.

'Is it possible that the Cinq-Cygne nobles can have made the attack?' cried Grévin.

'What!' returned Violette. 'Did you not recognise big Michu? He sprang upon me. I felt the weight of his fist, I did. What is more, the horses certainly came out of the Cinq-Cygne stables.'

Grévin looked round at the marks of horses' hoofs on the sand, and left the policeman at the gate to keep a watch over the precious footprints, sending Violette to fetch the justice of the peace from Arcis to verify them, while he himself rode back at once to the château de Gondreville and entered the drawing-room. The lieutenant and sub-lieutenant of the gendarmerie had come, with four men and a corporal.

The lieutenant, as might be expected, was the very corporal in whose head François had made a hole two years previously. Corentin had helped him to the name of his mischievous antagonist. This man's name was Giguet. His brother in the army became one of the foremost colonels in the artillery, and he himself rose by his merit to his rank in the gendarmerie, and subsequently to the command of the Aube division.

The sub-lieutenant, Welff by name, was the man who had served in Egypt. He drove Corentin from Cinq-Cygne to the hunting lodge, and thence to Troyes; and sufficiently edifying tales he heard, by the way, of the 'trickery' of Laurence and Michu, as Corentin was pleased to call it.

Consequently, both Giguet and Welff were sure to display no little zeal against the Cinq-Cygnes. Malin and Grévin had both been employed on the Code of Brumaire of the year IV, the work promulgated by the, so-called, National Convention under the Directory; and they had worked together. Grévin, knowing this piece of legislation to the bottom, was able to work the present affair

with incredible speed, on the presumption almost amounting to a certainty that Michu, the d'Hauteserres, and the Simeuses were guilty. Scarcely any one now living, save an old magistrate here and there, can recollect the old judicial organisation overturned by Napoleon about that very time by the promulgation of his Code, and the institution of the present system.

By the Code of Brumaire of the year IV the conduct of the prosecution of the misdemeanour committed at Gondreville was entirely in the hands of the Director of the Jury in the department. Remark, by the way, that the Convention struck the word 'crime' out of the dictionary of legal terms, and admitted nothing but misdemeanours: misdemeanours against the law, misdemeanours punishable as the case may be by fine, imprisonment, or disgrace, while a fourth series of penalties known as 'corporal punishments' included death. The 'corporal punishment' of death, however, was destined to be commuted after the Peace to twenty-four years of penal servitude. The Convention, it would seem, held that twenty-four years in a convicts' prison is equivalent to death; what is to be said of the Code Pénal with its 'penal servitude in perpetuity'?

The Code Napoléon, even then in process of completion, suppressed the Directors of the Jury altogether, because such enormous powers were united in their hands. So far as the conduct of the prosecution, and the drawing up of the indictment was concerned, a Director of the Jury was in some sort the agent of the judicial police, the public prosecutor, examining magistrate, and court of appeal, all in one. There was, however, one check upon him: his procedure and indictment were submitted to the commissary of the executive power for his *visa;* and all the facts taken down in examination were laid before a jury of eight, who heard the accused and the witnesses, and finally brought in a preliminary verdict, called the

verdict d'accusation. As this jury, however, met in the Director's private office, that functionary was pretty certain so to bring his influence to bear upon them that they could only work with and not against him. So much for the *jury d'accusation.* The second jury present in court during the actual trial of the accused, was composed of entirely new names, and called the *jury de jugement* by way of distinction from the first.

As for the Criminal Tribunal (re-named the Criminal Court by Napoleon), it consisted of a president, four judges, a public accuser, and a commissary representing the Government. Still between 1799 and 1806 there were Special Courts, as they were called, empowered to try without a jury, in certain cases and in certain departments; and these Special Courts consisted of judges from the Civil Tribunal. The conflict between special and criminal justice raised questions as to competence which were sent up to the Court of Cassation. If there had been a Special Court in the Aube, a case of an attempt on the life or liberty of an Imperial Senator would no doubt have gone up before it; but in that quiet department there was no provision for exceptional cases. So Grévin sent off the sub-lieutenant to the Director of the Jury at Troyes. The man that had served in Egypt galloped off post haste to Gondreville, and came back with that all but omnipotent functionary.

The Director of the Jury at Troyes, Lechesneau by name, had formerly been lieutenant of the bailiwick, and a salaried clerk of a committee of the Convention. He was a friend of Malin's and owed his appointment to him. As an experienced practitioner of the old criminal law, he as well as Grévin had been of great use to Malin in his judicial reforms under the Convention. For which reason Malin had recommended him to Cambacérès, and Lechesneau was appointed a receiver-general of taxes in Italy. Unluckily for his prospects, however, he became involved in an intrigue with a great lady at Turin; her husband

threatened to prosecute for the abduction of a child born in adultery, and Napoleon was obliged to cashier the official. Lechesneau, lying under such obligations to Malin, guessed the importance of the attempt, and came over with a picket of twelve gendarmes and a captain.

Before setting out, he naturally asked for an interview with the Prefect. Night was falling, the semaphore was not available, but an estafette was despatched to Paris to report such an unheard-of crime to the Minister of Police, the Chief Justiciary, and the Emperor.

Mesdames Marion and Grévin, Violette, and the Senator's man, with the justice of the peace and his clerks, were all in the drawing-room when Lechesneau came in. The house had already been searched, and the justice of the peace, with Grévin's assistance, was carefully collecting the evidence. The first thing that struck Lechesneau was the profound scheming revealed in the choice of the day and the hour. It was too late to set about seeking circumstantial evidence. At that time of year it is almost dark at five o'clock. Violette had not been able to start sooner in pursuit of the delinquents, and night often means impunity for evil-doers. To choose a holiday when everybody was sure to go to see the masquerade at Arcis, and the Senator equally certain to be at home — did not this ensure that there should be no witnesses ?

'Let us do justice to the clearsightedness of the agents of the prefecture of police,' said Lechesneau. 'They have continually warned us against the nobles at Cinq-Cygne, and told us that sooner or later they would play us some ugly trick or other.'

The Prefect of the Aube, meanwhile, was sending estafettes to all the prefectures round about Troyes, with instructions to search for traces of the five masks and the Senator. Lechesneau, feeling sure that the Prefect would take active measures, began by laying down the basis of the legal inquiry. With two such experts as Grévin and

the justice of the peace, the work went rapidly forward. The justice of the peace, one Pigoult by name, had been at one time head clerk in the solicitors' office in which Malin and Grévin studied chicanery at Paris. Three months after this affair he was appointed president of the tribunal at Arcis.

As for Michu, Lechesneau knew that he had previously threatened Marion, and knew likewise about the Senator's escape that day in the park. These two facts, the one a consequence of the other, were to constitute the two first counts on the present indictment; they pointed to Michu as the ringleader of the band, and this the more unmistakably since Monsieur and Madame Grévin, Violette, and Madame Marion declared that one of the five masks was exactly like the bailiff. Indeed, the colour of his hair, the man's whiskers, and thick-set build made a disguise pretty nearly useless. Who but Michu, besides, could have opened the gates of the Cinq-Cygne lodge with a key? The keeper and his wife, questioned on their return from Arcis, deposed that they had locked both gates before they went; and when the gates were examined by the justice of the peace, assisted by his clerk and the rural policeman, there was no sign of a forcible entrance.

'He must have kept the duplicate keys belonging to the château, when we turned him out,' said Grévin. 'And he must have been meditating some desperate step,' he added, 'for he has just sold his land. The purchase was to be completed in twenty days, and the money was paid over the day before yesterday in my office.'

'They will have arranged to throw all the blame on him,' exclaimed Lechesneau, struck by this circumstance. 'He has appeared as their instrument.'

Who could know their way about the château better than the Simeuses and d'Hauteserres? Not one of the attacking party had made any mistake; they had gone straight to the point in a way which showed that they knew

quite well what they wanted, and where to find it. None of the locks of the cupboards that they left open had been forced. Therefore they had keys. And strange to say they had not made the slightest disorder. There was no question of theft. Finally, Violette had not merely recognised the horses; he had actually seen the Countess on the watch at the Cinq-Cygne gate. All these facts, taken together with the depositions, afforded strong presumption of guilt against the Simeuses, and d'Hauteserres, and Michu, even for an unprejudiced tribunal; in the mind of the Director of the Jury, the presumption of guilt degenerated into certainty.

Now what should they want with the future Comte de Gondreville? To compel him to give up the estate? It was known that so far back as 1799 the bailiff had said that he had the money ready. The whole aspect of the case was changed at once.

Then Lechesneau asked himself what the object of that diligent search through the château could have been. Revenge was out of the question; the delinquents would have killed Malin outright. Yet, how if the Senator was actually dead and buried? And yet, as he had been kidnapped, he was probably under restraint. Why keep Malin under lock and key after the search had been carried out at the château? Clearly it were folly to suppose that a dignitary of the Empire could be kidnapped and the affair kept a secret for long. The news would spread so swiftly that any possible advantage to be gained by secrecy would soon be at an end.

To these objections, Pigoult replied that justice could never fathom all the motives in the minds of scoundrels. There were points that were never cleared up between the examining magistrate and the criminal; there were depths of conscience in which no human power could throw a light, unless the guilty man chose to confess.

Grévin and Lechesneau nodded assent to this, but none

the less their eyes pored on the darkness through which they were anxious to see.

'And the Emperor pardoned them too!' continued Pigoult, turning to Grévin and Madame Marion. 'He struck their names out of the List, though they were mixed up in the last plot against him.'

Without further delay, Lechesneau sent off all his force of gendarmerie to the forest and the Cinq-Cygne valley. The justice of the peace was despatched with Giguet, who became, in the terms of the Code, his auxiliary officer of police. The justice's instructions were to collect evidence for the prosecution in the commune of Cinq-Cygne, and to proceed, if necessary, to make all preliminary inquiries. To save time Lechesneau hurriedly dictated and signed a warrant for Michu's apprehension, in case the facts bore out the case against him. Then, so soon as the gendarmes and the justice had started off, Lechesneau went back to the important work of issuing warrants against the Simeuses and d'Hauteserres, the Code requiring that all the charges against the delinquents should be enumerated in the documents.

Giguet and the justice of the peace came down upon Cinq-Cygne so quickly that they fell in with the servants returning home from Troyes, arrested them, and took them before the mayor. When questioned, they answered in all simplicity, without a suspicion of the importance of the answer, that permission had been given to them yesterday to spend the whole day at Troyes. In answer to the justice of the peace, they all made answer alike that they had not asked for the holiday; Mademoiselle had offered it to them.

The judge thought these depositions so important that he sent Giguet back to Gondreville to ask Lechesneau to come over himself to be present at the arrest of the nobles at Cinq-Cygne, while he proceeded to the farm-house to take the supposed ringleader, Michu, by surprise, so that

all the arrests might be made simultaneously. So decisive did these new elements in the case appear that Lechesneau started out at once, with a parting caution to Grévin to keep a strict watch over the prints left by the horses' hoofs in the park.

Lechesneau, Director of the Jury, knew what satisfaction would be felt in Troyes with his proceedings against the *ci-devants*, the 'enemies of the people,' now become the Emperor's enemies. In such circumstances, a magistrate readily takes mere presumptions for evident proofs. Nevertheless, as Lechesneau drove from Gondreville to Cinq-Cygne, in the Senator's own carriage, it seemed to him that such audacity on the part of Michu and the young people was giddy to the last degree, and scarcely what might have been expected of Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne's intelligence. Lechesneau certainly would have risen high in his profession but for the weakness which brought him into disgrace in a fit of prudishness on the part of the Emperor. He thought within himself that there was something more in the abduction of a Senator than an attempt to extort a renunciation of Gondreville.

In every occupation — even in criminal investigation — there is something which may be called the professional conscience. Lechesneau's present perplexity arose out of that conscientiousness with which a man sets about any work that he loves, be he artist, man of science, or magistrate. For which very reason, the accused is probably safer with a judge than with a jury; a magistrate is suspicious of everything but reasoning, whereas a jury is apt to be carried away by fluctuations of sentiment. Lechesneau propounded several questions to himself, with a view to getting some satisfactory solution of them by the arrests.

Though all Troyes knew already that Senator Malin had been kidnapped, the news had not reached Arcis by eight o'clock; everybody was at supper when the gendarmerie and the justice were sent for; and as for the

valley of Cinq-Cygne, it was impossible that any one there should have heard of it.

And so the château was again surrounded by gendarmes. This time, however, it was not on a political, but a criminal charge; and the compromise that it is sometimes possible to arrange with the one department is quite impossible with the other.

Laurence had only to tell Marthe, Catherine, and la Durieu to stay in the château and neither to go out nor to look out of the windows; they obeyed her to the letter. The horses had been brought as far as the hollow lane opposite the breach in the fosse. Robert and Michu, the strongest of the group, had contrived to carry the bags quietly down through the gap into a cellar under the stairs in the tower called Mademoiselle's Tower. The last journey was made about half-past five, and Michu and the four gentlemen at once proceeded to bury the hoard. Laurence and the d'Hauteserres thought it expedient to wall up the cellar, and Michu with Gothard's help set about the work. Gothard was sent to the farm-house for some cement, left over when the new house was built, and Marthe went home to give him the bags in secret. Michu's new house was on the very knoll from which he saw the gendarmes' caps that November night, and the way to it lay along the hollow lane. Michu, being ravenously hungry, did his work so quickly that the place was walled up by half-past seven. He had sent Gothard for another bag of cement, and finding that he did not want it after all, he hurried home to stop the boy.

Even then they were lying in wait about the house; the rural policeman, the justice of the peace, and his clerk heard his footsteps and hid themselves till he was safely inside. Some way off he saw Gothard with the bag of cement on his shoulders, coming toward the château.

'It is done, boy,' he shouted; 'take that back, and come in and have supper with us.'

Michu's brow was covered with perspiration, his clothes were soiled with cement and earth from the stones taken out of the breach; he was in great spirits as he came into the kitchen where Marthe and her mother had put the soup on the table and were waiting for him.

Just as Michu turned on the tap to wash his hands, the justice of the peace appeared with his clerk, and the policeman behind him.

'What do you want with us, M. Pigoult?' asked Michu.

'In the name of the Emperor and the law, I arrest you,' returned the justice of the peace; and the three gendarmes came in, bringing Gothard with them. Marthe and her mother saw the metal rims of the gendarmes' caps and looked at each other in terror.

'Oh, pshaw! What for?' asked Michu, sitting down to the table. — 'Give me my supper,' he said to his wife, 'I am starving.'

The justice held out the warrant.

'You know why as well as we do,' he said, beckoning to the clerk to come forward and draw up the report.

'Well, Gothard, what are you gaping at? Do you want your supper or do you not? Let them write down their rubbish,' said Michu.

'Do you see the state of your clothes?' remarked the justice. 'You cannot deny that any more than you can deny what you said to Gothard outside in the yard.'

Michu's wife was amazed by his coolness. He ate voraciously and answered no questions; he had a clear conscience and his mouth was full. A dreadful misgiving took Gothard's appetite away.

'Look here,' said the rural policeman, in Michu's ear. 'What have you done with the Senator? From what they say, it is a matter of life and death for you.'

'Oh! my God!' cried Marthe. She had overheard the last few words, and dropped down as if thunder-struck.

'Violette must have played us some ugly trick!' exclaimed Michu, recollecting Laurence's words.

'Oh! so you knew that Violette saw you?' said the justice.

Michu bit his lips and resolved to say not another word. Gothard followed his example. The justice saw that it was useless to try to extract a word from him, Michu's 'contrariness' being well known in the country-side; so he ordered the men to tie his hands and Gothard's also, and to bring them to the château. Then he went to join the Director of the Jury.

Laurence and the rest of the party were so hungry, and dinner a matter of such extreme interest, that none of them changed their dress, but went straight into the drawing-room, she in her habit, and the rest of the party in their white doeskin breeches and green jackets. Monsieur and Madame d'Hauteserre were both anxious enough. The old gentleman had noticed their comings and goings, to say nothing of their evident want of confidence in him, for Laurence could not issue instructions to the elder d'Hauteserres as to the rest of the household. So when one of his sons evaded his questions and took refuge in flight, he spoke to his wife.

'I am afraid Laurence has been cutting out some more work for us.'

'What have you been hunting to-day?' asked Madame d'Hauteserre, turning to Laurence.

'Ah! some day you shall hear about the mischief that your children have been in,' Laurence answered laughing.

She spoke jestingly, but the old lady shivered at the words. Catherine announced that dinner was ready. Laurence took M. d'Hauteserre's arm, smiling to herself at the mischievous trick she had played her cousins, for one

of them was bound to offer an arm to old Madame d'Hauteserre, their oracle by common consent.

The Marquis led Madame d'Hauteserre to her place. The *Benedicite* was said, and the situation grew so solemn that Laurence and her cousins could feel the violent throbbing of their hearts. Madame d'Hauteserre, as she helped them, was struck with the Simeuses's anxious expression and the agitation in Laurence's sheep-like countenance.

'Something unusual has happened!' exclaimed the lady, looking round at them.

'To whom do you speak?' asked Laurence.

'To all of you.'

'For my own part, mother, I am as ravenous as a wolf,' said Robert.

Madame d'Hauteserre, still troubled in her mind, handed the Marquis a plate which she meant for his younger brother.

'I am like your mother,' she said, addressing him. 'I continually make mistakes in spite of your cravats. I thought I was helping your brother.'

'You have helped him better than you think for,' said the younger Simeuse, turning paler. 'He is the Comte de Cinq-Cygne.'

He, poor boy that had been so merry, was to be sadder now for the rest of his days; but he forced a smile as he looked at Laurence, and shut his lifelong regret within himself. In a moment the lover became the brother.

'What!' cried Madame d'Hauteserre, 'has the Countess made her choice?'

'No,' said Laurence. 'We left fate to act for us, and you were the instrument.'

She told the history of the morning's agreement, and while she spoke the Marquis, watching his brother's white face, longed to cry out, 'Take her, and *I* will go away to die!'

Just as dessert was served, some one outside in the dark-

ness tapped sharply at the dining-room window on the side of the garden. The elder d'Hauteserre opened it, and admitted the curé. His breeches had been torn on the park railings.

'Fly!' he cried. 'They are coming to arrest you.'

'Why?'

'I do not know that yet; but they are coming to take you into custody——'

There was a general outburst of laughter at this.

'We have done nothing!' the four young men cried out.

'Innocent or guilty, take horse for the frontier. When you are there you can establish your innocence. You may get over a condemnation for contempt of court, but there is no getting over a conviction obtained by popular clamour, a foregone conclusion from the first. Do you remember what Président de Harlay said?—"If I were accused of carrying off the towers of Notre Dame, the first thing I should do would be to run away."'

'But if you run away, do you not acknowledge that you are guilty?' remonstrated the Marquis de Simeuse.

'Do not fly!' said Laurence.

'Heroic nonsense as usual,' cried the curé, in desperation. 'If I had God's power for a moment, I would carry you off. But if they find me here in this state, they will turn my singular visit against you and me; I shall escape by the same way. Consider! There is still time. You are surrounded in all other directions, but they forgot the wall of the parsonage garden.'

The curé, poor man, was scarcely gone before the courtyard rang with the clank of sabres and trampling horse hoofs; the Abbé Goujet's advice, it seemed, was to meet with no more success than the Marquis de Chargebœuf's.

The younger brother turned to Laurence. 'Our common existence was out of the course of the laws of nature,' he said, in a melancholy tone, 'and our love is out of the ordinary course of nature, too. This abnormal

thing has won your heart. Perhaps it is because natural laws are set aside, that all the stories of the lives of twins are so sad. You see in our own case how persistently fate dogs us. Here is your decision, fatally deferred.'

Laurence, in a sort of stupor, heard the Director of the Jury speaking; the ominous words were droning in her ears.

'In the name of the Emperor and the law, I arrest the Sieurs Paul Marie and Marie Paul de Simeuse, Adrien and Robert d'Hauteserre!' He turned to the men with him and pointed out the splashes of mud on the clothes of the accused. 'The gentlemen cannot deny that they have spent part of the day on horseback,' he said.

'Of what do you accuse them?' Mademoiselle Cinq-Cygne asked haughtily.

'Do you not take Mademoiselle into custody?' inquired Giguet.

'I will leave her out on bail, until the evidence against her has been examined more fully.'

Goulard offered bail, simply asking the Countess to give her word of honour that she would not escape. Laurence crushed the sometime huntsman of the House of Simeuse with a glance so disdainful that she made a mortal enemy of the man. The tears stood in her eyes, tears of rage that reveal a hell of inward anguish. The four nobles exchanged stern glances and stood passive. As for Monsieur and Madame d'Hauteserre, in their terror lest Laurence and the young people had been deceiving them, they had sunk into a stupor which no words can describe. They had passed through so many fears for their children and won them back again, and now they sat glued to their arm-chairs, staring before them with unseeing eyes; listening, and hearing not a word.

'M. d'Hauteserre, is it necessary to ask you to go bail for me?' cried Laurence; the sound of her voice rang out shrill and heart-searching as the trumpet of doom on her

old guardian's ears. He understood all. He brushed the tears from his eyes and replied faintly:—

'Pardon me, Countess . . . you know that I am devoted to you, body and soul.'

Lechesneau had been impressed at first by finding the delinquents quietly at dinner; but his first suspicions returned at the sight of Laurence's thoughtful look, and the dazed faces of the old people. Laurence was trying to guess the snare set for them.

'Gentlemen,' Lechesneau said civilly, 'you are too well bred to make useless resistance. Will you, all four of you, come with me to the stables? Your horses' shoes must be removed in your presence; they may prove your guilt or innocence in the trial, and will be of importance as evidence. Will you also come with us, Mademoiselle?'

Lechesneau had sent for the Cinq-Cygne blacksmith and his boy as experts. While this operation was going forward in the stables, the justice of the peace brought Gothard and Michu to the château. The work of taking off the horseshoes, and sorting and marking them, so as to compare them with the prints left in the park, took some time. Nevertheless, on Pigoult's arrival, Lechesneau left the accused with the gendarmes, and went back to the dining-room to dictate the preliminary reports. Pigoult pointed out the state of Michu's clothes, and related the circumstances of the arrest.

'They must have murdered the Senator and plastered him up in a wall somewhere,' concluded the justice of the peace.

'I am afraid so, now,' replied Lechesneau. 'Where did you get the cement?' he asked, turning to Gothard.

Gothard began to cry.

'He is scared of the law,' said Michu. His eyes flashed fire; he looked like a lion caught in a net.

By this time the servants were released by the mayor, and came crowding into the antechamber to find Catherine

and the Durieus crying together. From them they learned the importance of the admission they had made. Every question put by the Director of the Jury or Pigoult, Gothard answered with sobs. He sobbed so much, in fact, that something like an attack of convulsions came on, and frightened them, and they let him alone. The little rogue, when he saw that they were not watching, looked at Michu and smiled. Michu gave him an approving glance. Lechesneau left Pigoult, and went out to hurry his experts.

There was a pause, then Madame d'Hauteserre at last turned to Pigoult. 'Can you explain the reason of the arrest, Monsieur?' she asked.

'The gentlemen are accused of carrying off the Senator by main force, and of illegally detaining him in confinement; for, in spite of appearances, we do not go so far as to suppose that they have taken his life.'

'And what penalty is incurred by such a crime?' asked old d'Hauteserre.

'Well, since the laws not invalidated by the Code still remain in force, the penalty is death,' replied the justice of the peace.

'Death!' cried Madame d'Hauteserre, and she fainted away. At this moment the curé appeared with his sister. Mademoiselle Goujet called Catherine and la Durieu.

'We have not so much as seen your damned Senator!' roared Michu.

'Madame Marion, Madame Grévin, M. Grévin, the Senator's own man, and Violette cannot say as much for you,' returned Pigoult, with a sour smile of magisterial conviction.

'I can make nothing of this,' said Michu. The answer stupefied him. Now, for the first time, he began to think that he and his masters had been entangled in some plot woven to take them.

Just at that moment the party returned from the stables. Laurence hurried to Madame d'Hauteserre, and that lady

recovered consciousness to say to her, 'The penalty is death!'

'Death!' repeated Laurence, looking round at the four. The word spread a dismay, which Giguet, as Corentin's pupil, turned to advantage. He drew the Marquis de Simeuse to a corner of the dining-room. 'It can all be arranged even yet,' he said. 'Perhaps it is only a joke. Why, confound it all, you have been in the army; between soldiers all is understood. What have you done with the Senator? If you have taken his life, there is no more to be said; but if you have imprisoned him somewhere, give him up. You can see yourself that the game is up. I am quite sure that the Director of the Jury will suppress the affair, and the Senator will co-operate.'

'We cannot understand your questions in the very least,' said the Marquis de Simeuse.

'If you take that tone, the thing will go far,' returned the lieutenant.

The Marquis turned to Laurence.

'We are going to prison, dear cousin, but do not be anxious; we shall come back again in a few hours' time. There is some misapprehension; it will be cleared up.'

'I wish it may, gentlemen, for your sake,' said Pigoult, making a sign to Giguet to remove the four nobles with Gothard and Michu. 'Do not take them to Troyes,' he said to the lieutenant. 'Keep them at the station at Arcis. They must be present to-morrow, with daylight, when the horseshoes are compared with the hoof-marks in the park.'

Before Lechesneau and Pigoult went, they examined Catherine, Monsieur and Madame d'Hauteserre, and Laurence. The Durieus, Marthe, and Catherine declared that they had not seen the family since breakfast. M. d'Hauteserre stated that he had seen them at three o'clock.

At midnight Laurence was left in the salon with Mon-

sieur and Madame d'Hauteserre, and the Abbé Goujet and his sister; the four young men who had brought life and love and joy to the château, were gone. For a long time she said no word, and no one ventured to break the silence. Never was grief deeper nor more complete. A sigh at last was heard; it came from Marthe, forgotten in a corner. She rose to her feet.

'Death! Madame. . . . They will just kill them, though they are innocent.'

'What have you done?' said the curé. And Laurence rose and went without a word. She wanted to be alone to gather up her strength to meet this unforeseen disaster.

III

A POLITICAL TRIAL IN THE TIME OF THE EMPIRE

At a distance of thirty-four years, in which great revolutions have taken place, none but elderly people can recollect the prodigious uproar made all over Europe when a Senator of the Empire was kidnapped. The trial of the young men accused of the act roused an amount of interest and curiosity never equalled, save, perhaps, over the case of Trumeau (the tradesman of the Place Saint Michel); the Widow Morin, under the Empire; the Fualdès and Castaing cases under the Restoration; or the trials of Madame Lafarge and Fieschi under the present Government. Such an attack on a member of the Senate brought down the Emperor's wrath; and the tidings of the arrest of the delinquents followed hard upon the news of the misdemeanour and the negative results of inquiries. The forest had been searched far and wide; they had gone all over the Aube and the neighbouring departments, and not the slightest trace of their passage, not a single clue to the Comte de Gondreville's place of detention could be found. The Minister of Justice came at a summons from the Emperor (after obtaining information from the police department), and explained the relative positions of Malin and the Simeuses for Napoleon's benefit; and his Majesty, much preoccupied at the time with weighty matters, was inclined to find a solution of the affair in the antecedent facts.

'The young men must be mad,' he said. 'A juris-

consult like Malin is sure to disavow any document extorted from him by violence. Keep a watch over these nobles, and find out how they set about the release of the Comte de Gondreville.'

The Emperor bade them proceed as quickly as possible in dealing with what he regarded, in the first place, as an attack upon his institutions; a fatal example of refusal to acquiesce in the changes brought about by the Revolution; an attempt to open up the great question of the National lands, and an obstacle in the way of that fusion of parties which had come to be the fixed idea of his home policy. He thought, in fact, that he had been tricked by the men who gave their promise to live quietly.

'Fouché's prophecy is fulfilled,' he said, remembering the words let fall two years ago by his present Minister of Police. But Fouché had spoken at the time under the influence of the impression left on his mind by Corentin's report of Laurence.

It is difficult under a constitutional government, when nobody takes any interest in a blind, deaf, indifferent, and thankless State, to understand the impetus that a word from the Emperor gave to his administrative machinery. That powerful will of his seemed to compel other things beside men. The word spoken, the Emperor forgot the affair. The Coalition of 1806 took him by surprise. He was thinking of fresh battles to fight; his mind was taken up with massing his regiments so as to strike a final blow at the very heart of the Prussian monarchy; but his desire to see prompt justice done, found a response in the mind of every magistrate in the Empire. They saw themselves in a precarious position. Cambacérès, in his quality of Arch-chancellor, and Régnier, the Minister of Justice, were even then drawing up a scheme of Tribunals of First Instances, Imperial Courts, and Courts of Cassation. They were discussing questions of custom right, to which Napoleon justly attached so much importance; they were seeking out

traces of the *parlements* done away with at the Revolution, and revising the lists of clerks and officials. Naturally, therefore, the magistrates in the department of the Aube thought that any proof of zeal in the affair of the kidnapping of the Comte de Gondreville would be an excellent recommendation. And Napoleon's supposition forthwith became a certainty for courtiers of power and the mass of the nation.

Peace still prevailed on the continent of Europe, and in France people were unanimous in admiration of the Emperor; he cajoled men through their interests and vanity, he coaxed, flattered, and conciliated individuals and public bodies, and everything else, even people's memories. Consequently everybody looked upon a deed of violence as a design against the public good; and the unfortunate and guiltless gentlemen were covered with general opprobrium. A small minority of nobles, confined to their estates, deplored the affair among themselves, but none of them dared to open their mouths. How, indeed, was it possible to stem the outburst of public opinion? The bodies of the eleven men who fell in 1792, shot down from behind the window shutters of the Hôtel de Cinq-Cygne, were dragged from their graves, and the whole department flung them at the heads of the accused. The *émigrés* as a class would wax bold, it was feared, and intimidate the buyers of their property by forcible protests against unjust spoliation. The Simeuses and d'Hauteserres were considered to be brigands, robbers, and murderers; Michu's complicity was especially fatal. Every head that fell in the department during the Terror, had been cut off by Michu or his father-in-law; the most absurd stories were current about him, and the exasperation was so much the more lively because Malin had put nearly every functionary in the Aube into his place. Not a single generous voice was uplifted to contradict the public clamour. The unfortunate prisoners, in fact, had no legal means of combating prejudice; for while the Code of Brumaire of

the year IV submitted the indictment and the judgment to two separate juries, it did not provide the accused with that great guarantee, the right of appeal to the Court of Cassation if there is evidence to show that a trial will be unfairly conducted.

On the day after the arrests were made, the family and servants at Cinq-Cygne were summoned to give evidence before the *jury d'accusation.* Cinq-Cygne was left in the care of the tenant, under the supervision of the abbé and Mademoiselle Goujet, who took up their abode there. Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne and Monsieur and Madame d'Hauteserre went to stay in Durieu's little house in one of the great straggling suburbs that spread about the town of Troyes. Laurence saw with a contraction of the heart the fury of the populace, the hatred of the bourgeoisie, the hostility of the administration; it was all brought home to her in the many little incidents which always befall the relatives of the defendants in a trial held in a country town. Instead of encouraging or compassionate words, she heard conversations meant for her to hear; a dreadful, clamorous desire for vengeance. Demonstrations of hate took the place of the strict politeness and reserve required by the occasion; and most of all, she felt the isolation that any one feels in such a case, and so much the more keenly because adversity teaches distrust. Laurence had recovered all her strength. Her cousins' innocence was evident, she despised the crowd too much to be frightened by its silent disapproval. She kept up her companions' courage, thinking all the while of that battle, which to judge from the rapidity of the procedure, must very soon be fought out in the criminal court. But her courage was to sink after an unexpected blow.

In the midst of their troubles, and the turn of the popular feeling against them, just as the unhappy family seemed to be alone in a desert, one man suddenly grew great in Laurence's eyes, and showed all the nobleness of his character. This was the Marquis de Chargebœuf.

The day after the *jury d'accusation* returned a true bill, when the indictment, with the formula *Oui, il y a lieu* written at the foot by the foreman of the jury, was sent up to the public accuser, and the warrant was converted into an order for the safe custody of the accused, the Marquis, in his old-fashioned calèche, came bravely to the rescue. Foreseeing that the course of justice was certain to be swift, the head of the house had hurried to Paris, and brought back with him one of the shrewdest and most upright of the *procureurs* of old times. For ten years Bordin had been the attorney of the noblesse, and his successor was the celebrated Derville. The worthy *procureur* at once chose as counsel the grandson of a President of the Parliament of Normandy, a young barrister who had studied under him, and was aiming at an appointment (and, in fact, after the trial, this young M. de Granville was nominated to an office revived by the Emperor, and became deputy public prosecutor at Paris, and one of the most famous magistrates of our time).

M. de Granville took up the case as an opportunity of distinguishing himself on his first appearance before the public. In those days, barristers (*avocats*) were replaced by officially appointed counsel, so that no case might be left undefended, and any citizen might plead the cause of innocence; but for all that, the accused usually employed a barrister, as before.

The old Marquis was startled by the havoc that sorrow had wrought in Laurence; but he behaved with admirable taste and tact. Not a word did he say of wasted advice. He introduced Bordin as an oracle to be obeyed to the letter, and young M. de Granville as a champion in whom they might put entire confidence.

Laurence held out her hand to the Marquis; her cordial grasp charmed him.

'You were right,' she said.

'Will you listen to my advice this time?' he asked.

The Countess made a sign of assent; Monsieur and Madame d'Hauteserre did likewise.

'Very well. Come to my house; it is in the middle of the town and close to the court-house. You and your counsel will be better lodged there than here, where you are huddled up together and much too far from the scene of action. You would have to cross Troyes every day.'

Laurence accepted the offer. M. de Chargebœuf took the two ladies to his house, and all through the trial the Cinq-Cygne party and their counsel stayed there. After dinner, when the doors were shut, Bordin made Laurence tell the whole story exactly as it happened, begging her not to leave out a single particular; although he and the young lawyer had heard it already in part from the Marquis during their journey from Paris to Troyes. Bordin sat listening, with his feet to the fire, without the slightest assumption of consequence. As for the counsel, young M. de Granville, he was divided between admiration of Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne and the attention he was bound to give to the facts of the case.

'Is that quite all?' asked Bordin, when Laurence had told the whole story of the drama down to that day.

'Yes,' said she.

The deepest silence prevailed for some minutes. One of the most solemn scenes in a man's life, and one that seldom comes into ordinary experience, was taking place in that room in the Hôtel de Chargebœuf. Every case is tried by counsel before it comes before a judge, just as every death is foreseen by the doctor before the final struggle with the laws of nature. Laurence, Monsieur and Madame d'Hauteserre, and the Marquis sat with their eyes fixed upon the *procureur's* dark old face, with its deep seams left by the small-pox. Life or death? — he was about to pronounce the word. Laurence glanced at M. de Granville, and saw that he looked downcast.

'Well, my dear Bordin?' said the Marquis, holding out

his snuff-box, which the *procureur* took in an absent-minded fashion. Bordin rubbed the calves of his legs (he wore black cloth breeches and black floss silk stockings, and the long coat of the eighteenth century); then he turned his crafty eyes upon his clients, but there was a misgiving in their expression which struck a chill into them.

'Am I to dissect this case,' asked he, 'and tell you frankly what I think?'

'Pray go on, Monsieur,' said Laurence.

'All that you have done with good intent turns against you,' Bordin proceeded to say. 'You cannot save your relatives; you can only try to get them off easily. The fact that you told Michu to sell his land will be taken as proof positive of your criminal designs upon the Senator. You sent off your servants to Troyes on purpose to be alone; it looks so much the more probable because it is the truth. The elder M. d'Hauteserre made a terrible remark to Beauvisage; it will ruin you all. Something that you yourself said in your own courtyard proves that you have borne ill-will to Gondreville for some time past. As for you, indeed, you were acting as sentinel at the park gates when the thing was done; if they do not proceed against you it is simply because they wish to avoid an element of interest in the case.'

'The case is not defensible,' said M. de Granville.

'So much the less so because the truth cannot now be told. Michu, the MM. de Simeuse and d'Hauteserre are bound simply to assert that they were out in the forest with you for a part of the day, and that they breakfasted at Cinq-Cygne. But if we can prove that you were all there at three o'clock, the time of the deed, who are the witnesses? Marthe, wife of one of the defendants, the Durieus and Catherine, all in your service, and Monsieur and Madame d'Hauteserre, parents of two of the accused. Such witnesses are worthless; the law will not take their testimony against you, and common sense rejects their

evidence in your favour. If you were so ill-advised as to say that you had gone out to find eleven hundred thousand francs in gold in the forest, you would send all five of them to the hulks as robbers. The Public Accuser, the jury, the bench, the audience, and every creature in France would think that you stole the gold from Gondreville and shut him up in order to do the deed. Taking the indictment as it stands the case is not clear against you; but given the simple truth, the whole thing looks absolutely transparent; the jury will think that the robbery clears up every obscure point, for a Royalist means a brigand nowadays. As it stands the case points to an act of revenge not inadmissible in the political situation. The accused have incurred the extreme penalty, but that is no disgrace in people's eyes; whereas if you bring the abstraction of specie into the affair, it must seem an unlawful proceeding, and you will lose a certain amount of interest that the public takes in the condemned, so long as the crime appears excusable. If at the very beginning you could have produced your map of the forest, and shown the hiding-places, the tin canisters, and the money, so as to account for your day, you might possibly have got off before impartial magistrates; but as things are, silence must be kept. God send that none of the defendants have compromised the case; but we shall see what we can make out of their examination.'

Laurence wrung her hands despairingly and raised her eyes to heaven in her distress; the depths of the gulf into which her cousins had fallen were opened out before her for the first time. The Marquis and M. de Granville both approved Bordin's terrible discourse. Old d'Hauteserre was crying.

'Why did you not listen to the Abbé Goujet, when he wanted them to fly?' Madame d'Hauteserre cried in exasperation.

'Ah!' exclaimed Bordin. 'If you could have saved them and did not do so their death will lie at your door.

Judgment for contempt of court gains time. And with time the innocent clear up their affairs. This is the blackest-looking case I have ever seen in my life, and I have seen some tolerably crooked ones, too.'

'It is inexplicable for everybody, even for us,' added M. de Granville. 'If the accused are not guilty somebody else has done this. Five people don't come up by magic in a place, nor are their horses shod exactly in the same way as the horses of the accused, nor do they put Malin in a pit, and make up to resemble the MM. de Simeuse, d'Hauteserre, and Michu, on purpose to ruin them. The persons unknown, the real delinquents, must have had some motive for slipping into the skins of five innocent men; and if we are to find them and discover any traces, we, like the government, should want a system of detectives and a pair of eyes in every commune for twenty leagues round——'

'Which is out of the question,' said Bordin, 'so it is useless to think of it. Never since justice was invented has any community found out how to put at the disposal of the wrongfully accused the power that the magistrate can use against crime. The machinery of the judicial system is at the disposal of the prosecution but not of the defence. The defence has neither detectives nor police; the power of society is not available to prove innocence; it is used to prove guilt. Innocence has argument only as a resource; and reasoning that carries weight with the judicial mind is often thrown away upon the prejudiced ears of the jury. The whole country is against you. The eight jurymen who returned a true bill were every one of them proprietors of National land. The *jury de jugement* will likewise consist of officials or buyers and sellers of National lands. In short, we shall have a *malignant* jury on Malin's case, and therefore a complete system of defence is a necessity; keep to it and die in your innocence. You will be condemned. We shall appeal to the Court of Cassation,

and we will try to gain time there. In the meantime I can collect proof, and there is still the appeal to mercy left. There you have the anatomy of the case and my opinion on it. If we win the day (for anything is possible in a court of law) it will be a miracle; but of all counsel that I know, yours is most likely to work a miracle and I will help him.'

'The Senator is sure to have the key to the enigma,' added M. de Granville, 'if any one bears you a grudge you always know who it is, and why. Here you see a man leaving Paris at the end of winter, coming alone to Gondreville, shutting himself up with his notary, and, as you may say, playing into the hands of five men who kidnap him.'

'His behaviour, certainly, is at least as extraordinary as ours,' said Bordin; 'but how are we to change our position from the accused to accusers, when the whole country is against us? You need good-will to do it, and the help of the Government, and a thousand times more proof than in an ordinary case. I can see malice aforethought of the very subtlest kind in our unknown enemies; they know how Michu and the MM. de Simeuse stand with regard to Malin. To say not a word, to take nothing! — there is prudence for you. They are anything but common criminals behind those masks, I can see! But imagine yourself saying such things as this to the sort of jury they will give us!'

Laurence was amazed and confused by this perspicacity in private affairs, the impersonal clear-sightedness which makes barristers and some magistrates so great. His remorseless logic clutched at her heart.

'Not ten criminal cases out of a hundred are thoroughly investigated in a court of law; and in a good third probably the mystery is never cleared up. There are cases which remain inscrutable for the prosecution and the defence, the law and the public, and yours is one of them.

As for his Majesty, even if the MM. de Simeuse had never wished to overturn his Government, he will not interfere, he has other fish to fry. But who the devil bears Malin a grudge? and why?'

Bordin and M. de Granville looked at one another. They looked as though they doubted whether Laurence had told the truth; and among all the many painful experiences during the trial, that moment of poignant anguish was the worst. She looked at her counsel, and their suspicions died away.

The next day the report of the examination was in the counsel's hands, and they were allowed to communicate with the accused. Bordin informed the family that the accused, as upright men, 'were keeping up well,' in professional phrase.

'M. de Granville is going to defend Michu,' said Bordin.

'Michu? —' cried M. de Chargebœuf, surprised at the change of plan.

'He is the heart of the affair, and that is where the danger lies,' returned Bordin.

'If he is the most exposed, the thing seems fair,' cried Laurence.

'We can see a few chances,' said M. de Granville, 'and we shall study them thoroughly. If it is possible to get them off, it will be because M. d'Hauteserre told Michu to mend one of the posts in the fence by the hollow way, and mentioned that a wolf had been in the forest. In a criminal court all turns upon the pleading, and the pleading turns on little things that may become immense, as you will see.'

Then Laurence sank into a mental prostration that invariably deadens the soul of every energetic person, when it is apparent that nothing they can do is of any avail. This was no question of compassing the downfall of a man or a government with the aid of a devoted band of men; here

was no scope for fanatical zeal enveloped in dark mystery. All classes were up in arms against her and her cousins. It is impossible, single-handed, to break open a prison; nor can you effect a rescue when the whole population is hostile to the prisoners, and the police are put on their mettle by the supposed audacity of the accused. Young M. de Granville was alarmed by the stupor that came over the high-spirited, generous girl, a stupor which her appearance exaggerated. He tried to raise her courage, but she answered, 'I am waiting and suffering in silence.'

The words spoken in such a tone, with such a look and gesture, were among the sublime things that would be famous if spoken on a wider stage. A few minutes afterwards old d'Hauteserre said to the Marquis de Chargebœuf: —

'The trouble that I have taken for my two unlucky boys! I had saved till there was an income of nearly eight thousand livres for them, from investments in the funds. If they had only chosen to go into the service they would have taken good positions and might have married very well at this day. And here are all my plans gone to wreck and ruin!'

'How can you think of their interests,' said his wife, 'when honour and life is involved?'

'M. d'Hauteserre thinks of everything,' said the Marquis.

While the party from Cinq-Cygne was waiting for the trial to come on in the criminal court, and making fruitless applications to be allowed to see the prisoners, something of the greatest importance was going on out of sight at the château. Marthe had made her deposition before the *jury d'accusation*, but the Public Accuser thought that her evidence was not worth bringing into the criminal court. The poor woman sat in the drawing-room at Cinq-Cygne, keeping Mademoiselle Goujet company; she had sunk, like many persons of extreme sensibility, into a kind

of apathy pitiful to see. To her, as to the curé, and in fact to anybody else who did not know how the accused had spent that day, their innocence seemed doubtful. There were moments when Marthe thought that Michu, with his masters and Laurence, had wreaked their revenge on the Senator. The unhappy wife knew Michu's devotion well enough to see that of all the accused he ran the greatest danger, both on account of his past and the share that he must have had in carrying out the present affair. The Abbé Goujet, his sister, and Marthe lost themselves among the probabilities to which this opinion gave rise, but by dint of dwelling on these thoughts their minds began to attach a certain significance to them. The condition of suspended judgment required by Descartes is as hard to obtain in the human mind as a vacuum in nature; and the mental process which secures the result is something as abnormal and artificial as the action of an air-pump. People have an opinion of some sort under any circumstances. And Marthe was so afraid that the accused were guilty that her dread amounted to a belief. That frame of mind proved fatal.

Five days after the arrest, just as she was going to bed about ten o'clock, she heard her name called from the courtyard; her mother had walked over from the farm.

'There is a workman come from Troyes with a message for you from Michu,' she said; 'he is waiting for you in the hollow way.'

Both the women took the short cut through the breach. It was so dark in the lane that Marthe could only see a man's form looming through the shadows.

'Speak, madam, so that I may know if you really are Madame Michu,' said a somewhat uneasy voice.

'I certainly am. What do you want with me?'

'Good,' said the stranger. 'Give me your hand; do not be afraid of me.' Then he bent forward and whispered,

'Michu sent me with a word or two for you. I am one of the jailers; if they find out that I have been absent it will be the ruin of us all. Trust me. Your good father found me my place in time past; so Michu counted on me.'

He slipped a letter into Marthe's hand, and vanished among the trees without waiting for an answer. Something like a shiver ran through Marthe as she thought that now, no doubt, she should know the secret. She ran to the farm with her mother, and locked herself in to read the letter.

'My dear Marthe, — You may reckon on the discretion of the bearer; he can neither read nor write. He is one of the staunchest Republicans of the Babeuf conspiracy. Your father often made him useful, and he looks on the Senator as a traitor. Well, now, dear wife, we have shut up the Senator in the vault where the masters were hidden once before. The wretch has only victuals enough for five days, and as it is to our interest that he should live, take him provisions to last for another five days at least, as soon as you have read these few lines. The forest is certain to be watched, so be as careful as we used to be when the young gentlemen were in hiding. Do not speak to Malin; do not say one single word; and put on one of our masks; you will find it lying on the cellar steps. You must keep the most absolute silence on this secret that I am obliged to tell you. Not a word of it to Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne, or she might show the white feather. Fear nothing for me. We are sure of coming safely out of this affair, and if it comes to that, Malin will save us. Lastly, I need not tell you to burn this letter as soon as you have read it. If any one saw a single line of it, it might cost me my head. Most lovingly yours,

'Michu.'

The only persons who knew of the existence of the hiding-place in the mound in the forest were Michu, François, the four nobles, Laurence, and Marthe herself; so, at least, Marthe was certain to think, for her husband had said nothing to her of his encounter with Peyrade and Corentin. The letter could only come from Michu, and besides, it seemed to be written and signed by him. If Marthe had gone at once to her mistress and the two lawyers, who knew that the accused were not guilty, the crafty *procureur* might have gained some light on the treacherous stratagem that had taken his clients; but, like most women, Marthe acted on her first impulse, and saw the force of the obvious considerations. She threw the letter into the fire. Yet, some unaccountable flash of prudence led her to rescue the blank half of the sheet and the first few lines. There was nothing there to compromise any one. She sewed the scrap of paper into her dress.

Then she thought with no little dismay that the prisoner had been without food for twenty-four hours, and resolved to take meat and bread and wine to the vault that very night. Curiosity and humanity alike forbade her to put off the errand till to-morrow. She heated the oven to bake a couple of round loaves, which she made herself, and with her mother's help prepared a game pasty and a rice pudding, and roasted a couple of fowls. About half-past two that morning, she packed the provisions and two bottles of wine in a basket, strapped it about her shoulders, and set off through the forest, taking Couraut with her. The dog made an admirable scout, scenting a stranger at a great distance, and returning to his mistress with a low growl, and muzzle turned to the dangerous quarter.

It was nearly three o'clock that morning when Marthe reached the pool and left Couraut on guard. It took nearly half an hour to move the stones from the opening.

She found the mask on the step as the letter said, and entered the vault with a dark lantern. Apparently the Senator's imprisonment had been arranged a long while beforehand. There was an opening which Marthe had not seen on former visits; a hole about a foot square had been roughly contrived in the door, while the bolt was secured by a padlock, lest Malin, with a prisoner's time and patience at his disposal, should succeed in reaching it from within.

The Senator had risen from his bed of moss and heaved a sigh; he guessed at the sight of a masked figure that he was not yet to be set at liberty. He watched Marthe as well as he could by the uncertain light of the dark lantern till at last he recognised her. He knew her by her dress, her stout figure, and her movements, and when she passed the pasty through the hole he let it fall to catch her by the hands. Swiftly as might be he tried to pull two rings from her fingers, her wedding-ring and a little keepsake given her by Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne.

'You cannot deny that you are Madame Michu, my dear madam,' he exclaimed.

At the touch of the Senator's fingers, Marthe clenched her fist and dealt him a vigorous blow in the chest. Then, without a word, she cut a sufficiently strong stick, and the Senator received the rest of his provisions on the end of it.

'What do they want with me?' he asked.

Marthe hurried away without replying. She had nearly reached home, towards five o'clock, when Couraut gave warning of the unwelcome presence of some one on the skirts of the forest. Retracing her steps, she went toward the lodge that had been her home for so many years; but as she came out into the avenue the Gondreville park-keeper saw her in the distance, and she at once decided to go straight toward him.

'You are out very early, Madame Michu,' was his greeting.

'We are so unlucky that I have to do a servant's work, myself,' she said. 'I am going to Bellache for some seeds.'

'Then have you no seeds at Cinq-Cygne?' asked he.

Marthe did not answer. She went on to Bellache and asked Beauvisage to let her have several kinds of seeds. 'M. d'Hauteserre had told her to try a change of strain,' she said. Marthe had no sooner gone than the Gondreville keeper came over to the farm to know why she had been there.

Six days afterwards Marthe took the provisions at midnight, so as to avoid keepers. She had learned prudence. Evidently they were watching the forest. A third time she took food to the Senator. The trial had begun, and it was with something like panic that she listened while the curé read the report aloud.

She took the abbé aside, made him swear to keep her secret as if it were told in confession, showed him the rescued fragments of Michu's letter, and told him where the Senator lay hidden. The abbé asked at once whether Marthe had other letters in her husband's handwriting to compare with the burnt scrap; and Marthe went back to the farm on this errand, to find a summons to appear as a witness in the case. When she came back to the château, she heard that the Abbé Goujet and his sister had been likewise summoned by the defence, and all three of them were obliged to set out at once for Troyes. In this manner all the actors in the drama, and even those that might be called the supers, were all assembled on the stage where the fate of two families was at stake.

There are very few places in France where the surroundings of justice contribute to that impressiveness which should never be lacking. Religion and kingship apart, is not the judicial system the most important piece of social mechanism? Everywhere, even in Paris, the shabbiness and bad arrangement of the premises and the

lack of a proper setting diminish the effect of the enormous power of the law upon the imagination of a people more vainglorious, more fond of spectacular display in public buildings, than any other nation of modern times.

The arrangements are almost the same everywhere. You enter a long rectangular hall, with a desk covered with green baize at the further end on the slightly raised platform where the judges sit in ordinary arm-chairs. The Public Accuser's seat is placed to the left, just beyond the jury-box, a space enclosed along the wall, and provided with chairs for the jury. The accused, and the policemen on duty sit on a bench in a similar enclosed space against the opposite wall, the counsel for the defence is immediately below, and in front of the prisoners. Below the platform, at a table covered with documents relating to the case, sits the clerk of assize; and (before the Emperor remodelled the courts) the commissary for the government and the Director of the Jury used to sit each at a table on either side of the judges' desk. Two ushers of the court hover about in the space left for witnesses. A wooden balustrade connects the jury-box with the dock at the lower end, forming an enclosure where benches are placed for witnesses that have given their evidence, and a few privileged auditors; while a shabby gallery above the entrance door, and opposite the judges, is reserved for the accommodation of the authorities, and ladies, and others admitted by the President who regulates these matters. As for the unprivileged public, they are allowed to stand in the space between the wooden balustrade and the entrance.

The Criminal Court of Troyes looked like any tribunal or assize court of the present day. But in 1806, neither the President nor the four judges who composed the court, nor the Public Accuser, nor the Director of the Jury, nor any one else except the gendarme wore any distinctive dress or badge of office to relieve the general bareness of the place,

and tolerably insignificant countenances. The crucifix was lacking, with its moral lesson for the judges and the accused. Everything was dismal and commonplace. The pomp and circumstance so necessary in the interests of the body social, perhaps afford a certain solace to the criminal. People flocked eagerly to the trial, as they always have done on such occasions, and always will do, so long as manners and customs remain unreformed; so long as France fails to discern that while publicity is by no means secured by the admission of the public, the trial, on the other hand, becomes an ordeal, painful beyond measure; how painful, no legislator can have imagined or it would never have been inflicted. Manners and customs are often more cruel than the law. The manners of the time are the outcome of human nature; the law is framed by the intellect of the nation, and customs not seldom irrational are stronger than law.

A mob had gathered about the court-house. The President was obliged to have the doors guarded by the military, as is usual during sensational trials. Inside, the space between the door and the balustrade was crowded with people so tightly packed that they could scarcely breathe.

M. de Granville appeared for Michu, and Bordin for the MM. de Simeuse, while a local barrister represented Gothard and the MM. d'Hauteserre, the least compromised among the accused. All three lawyers were at their posts before the proceedings began. Their faces inspired confidence; a doctor never allows a patient to see his misgivings, and a lawyer always shows his client a hopeful countenance. These are the rare cases when insincerity becomes a virtue.

There was a murmur in favour of the four young men when the prisoners came into court, looking somewhat paler for the twenty days of confinement and suspense.

The close resemblance between the twin brothers excited the highest degree of interest in them. Perhaps each one thought that Nature should have taken an especial care of one of her most curious rareties, and felt tempted to atone for one of the oversights of fate. Their noble, simple bearing, without a trace of either shame or bravado, impressed the women not a little. All four of the gentlemen and Gothard appeared in the costume in which they were arrested, but Michu's clothes being part of the evidence, he wore his best — a blue greatcoat, a brown velvet 'Robespierre' waistcoat, and a white cravat. The poor man paid the penalty of his sinister looks. A murmur of horror broke from the audience if he made any chance movement, or turned his keen, bright, tawny eyes on them. They were inclined to see the finger of God in his appearance in the dock, whither his father-in-law had sent so many victims. And he, with true magnanimity, looked at his masters and repressed an ironical smile. 'I am doing you harm,' his eyes seemed to say. Five of the prisoners exchanged cordial greetings with their counsel. Gothard still acted the idiot.

After the counsel for the defence had judiciously used their right to challenge some of the names on the jury (the Marquis de Chargebœuf had the courage to sit between M. Bordin and M. de Granville to give information on this point), the panel was completed, the indictment read over, and the accused separated for examination. Their answers were remarkably similar. They had ridden out in the forest all morning, returning at one o'clock to breakfast at Cinq-Cygne. Afterwards, between three and half-past five, they were again in the forest. This was the substance of all their statements; the details varied with the particular circumstances in each case. The MM. de Simeuse, for instance, asked by the President why they had gone out so early in the

morning, separately declared that since their return home they had had thoughts of buying Gondreville; that, as Malin came down on the previous day, they meant to treat with him, and had gone out with Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne and Michu to make a survey on which they meant to base their offer. Meanwhile the MM. d'Hauteserre, with their cousin and Gothard, had gone after a wolf that some of the peasants had seen. If the Director of the Jury, who found the hoof-marks in the park at Gondreville, had taken as much pains to find the prints left in the forest, they could have shown that they had been far away from the château at the time.

The examination of the MM. d'Hauteserre confirmed these statements, which agreed with their previous examination by the magistrate. Obliged to give some reason for their excursion, each of them separately hit upon the idea of a hunting party. Some peasants had seen a wolf in the forest a few days before, and each of them took this as a pretext.

Still the Public Accuser made the most of the discrepancies between the present and the preliminary examinations, when the MM. d'Hauteserre deposed that they all went hunting together. Now it seemed that the d'Hauteserres and Laurence de Cinq-Cygne had gone hunting, while the MM. de Simeuse had been surveying the forest.

M. de Granville pointed out, that, as the misdemeanour was committed some time between two and half-past five, the accused must be believed when they accounted for the way in which they had spent the morning.

To this, the Accuser replied that it was to the prisoner's interest to conceal their preparations for the illegal detention of the Senator.

Then the skill with which the defence was conducted became apparent to all eyes. Judge, jury, and spectators soon saw that victory would be hotly disputed. Bordin

and M. de Granville seemed to be provided for all contingencies. Innocence is bound to give a clear and plausible account of its actions; and therefore it is the duty of the counsel for the defence, to oppose a probable romance to the improbable romance invented by the prosecution. If the prisoner's counsel believes in his client's innocence, he shows that the case for the prosecution is a myth. The public examination of the four nobles gave a sufficient and favourable explanation of the matter. So far all went well. But Michu's examination was a more serious affair, and on that the battle closed. Every one now understood why M. de Granville had chosen to defend the servant rather than the masters.

Michu admitted that he had threatened Marion, but flatly denied the violence attributed to his threats. As to lying in wait for Malin, he said that he had simply been walking in the park; the Senator and Grévin might have been frightened by the sight of the muzzle of his gun and taken it as a threat when no threat was intended. He pointed out that if a man is not used to handling a gun, he may imagine that the muzzle is pointed at him, when, as a matter of fact, it is resting on the owner's shoulder; and he accounted for the condition of his clothes, by the fact that he had a fall as he climbed the gap on his way home.

'It was too dark to see to climb,' he said; 'I clutched at the stones to hoist myself up to the hollow way, and some of them came tumbling down on me.'

Questioned as to the cement that Gothard was carrying, he replied now as on all previous occasions, that it was wanted to fix one of the gate-posts at the top of the hollow way.

The Public Accuser and the President both asked him how he came to be in the gap in the fosse, when he had been mending the gate at the other end of the way, especially as the justice, the gendarmes, and the rural policeman all declared that they heard him come up the

lane. Michu replied that M. d'Hauteserre had blamed him for not doing the little job before, because the commune might raise difficulties about the right of way. So he had gone to the château to say that the gate-post had been mended.

M. d'Hauteserre, as a matter of fact, had put a gate across the hollow lane to prevent the commune from claiming the right of way; and Michu, seeing how important it was to account for the state of his clothes and the use of the cement which he could not deny, had invented this subterfuge. If the truth often looks like fiction in a court of law, fiction, on the other hand, often looks like truth. Both the prosecution and the defence attached great importance to the statement; and all the efforts of the defence, all the suspicions of the Public Accuser, centred about this capital point.

Gothard, prompted no doubt by M. de Granville, admitted that Michu told him to fetch some bags of cement; hitherto he had always begun to cry as soon as any questions were put to him.

'Why did not you or Gothard take the justice of the peace and the policeman to the gate at once?' asked the Public Accuser.

'I never thought that it was to be a question of life and death for us.'

All the prisoners except Gothard were removed. When the boy was left alone in the dock the President advised him to tell the truth, in his own interests, reminding him that his pretence of idiocy had broken down. Not one of the jury mistook him for an idiot. If he refused to tell what he knew he laid himself open to heavy penalties; whereas by telling the truth, he would probably clear himself. Gothard began to cry, wavered, and said at length that Michu had told him to bring several bags of cement; but that each time he met him near the farm. They asked how many bags he had brought down.

'Three,' he said.

At this a dispute began between Gothard and Michu as to the number of the bags. Were there three, counting the bag that Gothard was bringing at the time of his arrest, or three besides the last? The point was decided in Michu's favour. The jury held that only two bags had been used, and it seemed that they had made up their minds on that score already. Bordin and M. de Granville thought it advisable to give them a surfeit of cement till they grew so confused and weary of it that they understood nothing. M. de Granville in conclusion suggested that experts should be appointed to examine the condition of the posts.

'The Director of the Jury,' urged the defence, 'was satisfied to inspect the place not so much to obtain the unbiassed opinion of experts, as to find proofs of foul play on Michu's part. But in our opinion he failed in his duty; and his error should not be turned to our disadvantage.'

The court accordingly appointed experts to discover whether a post had recently been set. The Public Accuser, on the other hand, tried to turn the circumstance to account before the inquiry was made.

'So you chose a time of day when it is almost dark, to fix a post, and to do it all by yourself?' he asked Michu.

'M. d'Hauteserre had given me a scolding.'

'But if you used cement over it, you must have taken a trowel and a hod. Now, if you went off so promptly to tell M. d'Hauteserre that you had carried out his orders, it is impossible to explain how Gothard came to be bringing you more cement. You must have gone right past your house, and in that case you could have left your tools there and spoken to Gothard.'

The argument came like a thunderbolt. There was a dreadful silence in the court.

'Come now,' said the Public Accuser, 'confess; that hole was not dug for the post——'

'Then do you suppose it was for the Senator?' asked Michu, with intense irony in his tones.

M. de Granville formally called the Public Accuser to order on this point. Michu was accused not of murder, but of kidnapping and false imprisonment. Nothing could be more serious than such a question. By the Code of Brumaire of the year IV, the Public Accuser was forbidden to bring up any new charge in the course of the trial; he was bound to keep to the indictment, or the trial would be annulled.

The Public Accuser replied to the effect that Michu, the prime mover in the affair, had taken all the responsibility on his own shoulders, to save his masters; and that he might very well have been obliged to block up the entrance to the place as yet unknown, where the Senator groaned.

Closely pressed with questions, worried in Gothard's presence, and made to contradict himself, Michu brought down his fist with a bang on the ledge of the dock.

'I have had nothing to do with kidnapping the Senator,' he said. 'I incline to think that his enemies have simply shut him up somewhere; but if he makes his appearance, you will see that the cement could not possibly have come into the affair at all.'

'Good!' said M. de Granville, addressing the Public Accuser, 'you have done more in my client's defence than anything I can say.'

The court rose, after a bold assertion which took the jury by surprise and told for the defence. The bar of Troyes and Bordin greeted Michu's young counsel with enthusiastic congratulations. The Public Accuser was disturbed in his mind. He was afraid that he had fallen into some trap; and, as a matter of fact, he had walked into a snare very skilfully set for him by the defence, in which Gothard had just distinguished himself. Wags in the town said that the case had been patched up; that the Public Accuser had made a botch of the business, and

the Simeuses had been whitewashed. Anything in France is fair game for a jest, — a jest rules the nation. Your Frenchman cuts his joke on the scaffold, in the Beresina, at the barricades; probably, even on the Day of Judgment, there will be one or two that will make an epigram here and there.

Next day the witnesses for the prosecution were called. Madame Marion, Madame Grévin, Grévin himself, the Senator's man, and Violette made depositions as might be expected. All of them showed more or less hesitation as to the four nobles; all were quite certain as to Michu. Beauvisage repeated the words let fall by Robert d'Hauteserre; the peasant, who came for the calf, deposed to having heard Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne's remark about burning Gondreville. The blacksmiths were called, and confirmed their previously given evidence as to the horseshoes from the Cinq-Cygne stables, which exactly fitted the prints left by the park gate. Naturally, there was a hot battle over this fact between M. de Granville and the Public Accuser. The Cinq-Cygne blacksmith was summoned by the defence, and it came out in the course of the examinations, that precisely similar horseshoes had been sold a few days previously to persons unknown in the country. The smith likewise declared that he shod plenty of horses in that fashion besides those from Cinq-Cygne. Finally, Michu's horse happened to have been shod at Troyes, and the prints could not be found among the others in the park.

'Michu's double did not know that,' said M. de Granville, looking at the jury, 'and the prosecution has failed to prove that we used one of the horses from the château.'

With withering emphasis he disposed of Violette's evidence as to the horses. The man had seen them at a distance with their tails turned toward him. But in spite of incredible efforts made on Michu's behalf, the weight of circumstantial evidence against him was too strong.

The Accuser, the public, the court, and the jury, all felt alike that the servant's guilt once proven, the masters' connivance was a necessary deduction. Bordin had rightly guessed where the knot lay when he appointed M. de Granville to defend Michu; but by so doing, the defence owned the weak points of their case. Meantime, everything concerning the ex-bailiff of Gondreville, became a matter of palpitating interest.

Michu's demeanour was superb throughout. He displayed all the sagacity with which nature had gifted him; the public could not choose but see that this was no ordinary man, and, strange to say, for that very reason people felt the more convinced that he was guilty. The witnesses for the defence carried less weight with the jury than the witnesses for the prosecution; the former appeared to do their duty, and were heard as a matter of duty. In the first place neither Marthe nor Monsieur nor Madame d'Hauteserre could be sworn; Catherine and the Durieus, as domestic servants, were in the same predicament. M. d'Hauteserre said that he had in fact ordered Michu to reset a post that had been overturned. The experts' report, read at this juncture, confirmed old M. d'Hauteserre's testimony, but at the same time it told in favour of the Director of the Jury, for it was stated that the commission found it impossible to say when the work was done; the post might have been mended at any time within the last six weeks.

Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne's appearance excited the keenest interest, but the sight of her cousins in the dock, after a separation of twenty-three days, affected her so violently that she looked guilty. She felt a dreadful longing to be beside her twin cousins. She said afterwards that it was all that she could do to fight down a furious desire to kill the Public Accuser that she too might stand beside them — a criminal in the eyes of the world. But she told quite simply how she had seen the smoke in the

park, as they went back from Cinq-Cygne, and thought that something must be on fire. For some time she had thought that they were burning weeds.

'And yet,' she said, 'I will call your attention to something which I only remembered afterwards. The folds of my collar and the loops of braid on my habit were filled with ashes, like burnt papers carried by the wind.'

'Was there a considerable volume of smoke?' asked Bordin.

'Yes,' replied Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne. 'I thought that something was on fire.'

'This may change the whole aspect of the case,' said Bordin. 'I make application to the court for an order for the immediate investigation of the place where the fire was seen.'

The President granted the order.

Grévin, recalled by the defence, declared that he knew nothing on this head. But Bordin and Grévin exchanged glances which let the light into the minds of either.

'So that is where the gist of it lies!' the old *procureur* said to himself.

'They are on the scent!' thought the notary.

But the shrewd, crafty pair knew equally well that the investigation was useless. Bordin knew that Grévin would be as close as a wall, and Grévin congratulated himself on having cleared away all traces of the fire. The experts and Pigoult were commissioned to search the park so as to settle the point, a side issue as it seemed, and a puerile matter; albeit, it is of capital importance in the rehabilitation which history owes to the accused. They declared that they found no traces of a fire anywhere. Two labourers, produced by Bordin, deposed that by the keeper's orders they had dug over a piece of burnt turf; what had been burned there they could not say. The keeper, recalled by the defence, said that as he went past the château on his way to see the masquerade at Arcis, the

Senator told him to dig over a bit of meadow which he (Malin) had noticed that morning as he walked out.

'Had they burnt weeds or papers there?'

'I saw nothing to lead me to suppose that papers had been burnt,' said the keeper.

The depositions of Mademoiselle Goujet and the curé of Cinq-Cygne made a good impression. As they walked toward the forest after vespers, they had seen the party with Michu riding out from the château. The abbé's position and principles lent weight to his words.

The Public Accuser's address to the jury was the ordinary speech made on such occasions. He felt secure of a condemnation. The accused were incorrigible enemies of France, French institutions, and French laws. They thirsted for disorder. They had been mixed up in plots against the Emperor's life; they had been in the Army of Condé; and yet that magnanimous sovereign had struck their names out of the list of *émigrés*. And this was how they repaid his clemency!—Out came all the oratorical flourishes used afterwards under the Bourbons against the Bonapartists, and again, at a later day, under the Orléans branch, against Republicans and Legitimists alike. Commonplaces, which might have had some meaning under a long-established government, must seem comic, to say the least, when history finds them in the mouth of the public prosecutor through every political change. The old saying that arose out of more ancient troubles might be applied here—'The sign is changed, but the wine is the same as ever!' The Public Accuser (in this instance one of the most distinguished lawyers in the service of the Imperial Government) maintained that the misdemeanour was a sign of the times, an indication of a deliberate intention on the part of the returned *émigré's* to protest against the occupation of their forfeited estates. He made his audience shudder duly over the Senator's present position. Then, his ingenuity stimulated by the certain prospect of a reward for

his zeal, he piled up proofs, semi-proofs, and probabilities in one accumulation, and sat quietly awaiting his adversaries' fire.

This was the first and last criminal case in which M. de Granville appeared for the defence; but it made his reputation. In the first place, he opened his pleading with that irresistible eloquence which we of to-day admire so much in M. Berryer. What was more, he was convinced that his clients were not guilty, and genuine conviction carries a force with it that nothing else can give.

The principal points of a defence, which the newspapers of the day reported in full, were as follows: —

He began by putting Michu's life in its true light. It was a noble story to tell; the vibrations of the greatest and highest feeling in it roused the sympathies of many. Michu sat listening to his rehabilitation by that eloquent voice, and at times the tears overflowed the tawny eyes and trickled over his stern face. At that moment he looked as he really was, — simple and crafty as a child, and yet a man whose whole life had been ruled by one thought. Suddenly he had become comprehensible, and his tears completed the revelation. The effect produced upon the jury was great. The adroit counsel for the defence seized his opportunity to discuss the indictment.

'Where is the substantial proof of the charge? Where is the Senator?' he asked. 'You accuse us of imprisoning him and even of walling him up with stones and cement. But in that case we alone know where he is; and as you have kept us in prison for twenty-three days he must be starved to death by this time. We are murderers, and you have not charged us with murder. . . . But, if he is alive, we have accomplices; and if we had accomplices and the Senator is still alive, could we not produce him? When the intentions that you attribute to us have miscarried, why should we aggravate our position, since there is nothing to be gained by it? Repentance might possibly buy pardon

now that we have failed; and yet we are supposed to persist in detaining a man from whom we can get nothing! Is not this absurd? You may take away your cement; it fails in its effect,' he continued, addressing the Accuser. 'We are either stupid criminals (which you do not believe) or innocent men, victims of circumstances inexplicable for us as for you. You had far better have looked for that mass of papers burnt in the Senator's grounds. That fact shows that there is some reason more pressing than your hypothetical one, some other way of accounting for his illegal detention ——'

Into these suppositions M. de Granville entered with wonderful skill. He dwelt upon the high character of the witnesses for the defence, witnesses whose lively religious faith argued a belief in the future and eternal punishment. On this head he was sublime; he saw how to make a profound impression.

'What!' said he, 'the criminals are quietly dining after their cousin brings the news that the Senator has been kidnapped. The officer sent to arrest them suggests that they should give up the Senator and the affair shall go no further, and they refuse; they do not even know what the charge is.'

With that M. de Granville hinted at a mystery; time would provide a clue to it, and the injustice of the accusation would come to light. Once upon this ground he had the audacity and ingenuity to put himself in the place of one of the jury; he rehearsed his deliberations with his colleagues; he described his distress of mind, when it was discovered that there had been a mistake, and that he had been the means of bringing a heavy sentence upon innocent men; he painted his remorse so vividly and recapitulated all his doubts so forcibly that he left the jury in horrible anxiety.

Juries in those days were not hardened to this kind of appeal; it possessed the charm of novelty and M. de Gran-

ville's auditors were visibly shaken by it. To M. de Granville's fervid eloquence succeeded the wily and specious Bordin. He multiplied considerations, he brought forward all the obscure points, and made them inexplicable. He set himself to make an impression upon the mind and judgment, as M. de Granville had appealed to the imagination and the heart. He succeeded, in fact, in entangling the jury with such earnest conviction that the Public Accuser saw his scaffold falling to pieces. This was so evident that the counsel representing the MM. d'Hauteserre and Gothard, finding there was no attempt to press the charge against his clients, left his case to the discretion of the jury.

The Accuser made application for an adjournment; he would give his rejoinder on the morrow. Bordin, reading acquittal in the eyes of the jury, if they considered their verdict while the effect of the pleading was fresh, objected, on the score of law and fact, to another night of suspense for his innocent clients. In vain. The judges held a consultation.

'It seems to me,' said the President, 'that the interests of the public equal the interests of the accused. The court could not refuse such an application if made by the defence, without falling short of all ideas of justice; so it must be granted to the prosecution.'

'"A miss is as good as a mile,"' said Bordin, looking at his clients. 'Acquitted to-day, you may be brought in guilty to-morrow.'

'In any case, we can only admire you,' said the elder Simeuse.

Tears stood in Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne's eyes. She had not looked for such a success after the doubts of her counsel. People came to congratulate her, and every one made sure that her cousins would be acquitted.

But the whole scene was to be changed by a sudden, startling event, — the most unexpected and ominous occur-

rence that ever altered the entire aspect of a criminal case.

Senator Malin was found on the high road to Troyes, at five o'clock in the morning on the day after M. de Granville's pleading! Persons unknown had set him at liberty while he slept; and he was now on his way to Troyes, totally unaware that Europe was ringing with his name, or that a trial was proceeding, and merely glad to breathe fresh air again. If other people were amazed to see the man upon whom the whole drama turned, he was at least as much astounded by the news that they gave him. A farmer lent his cart, and Malin soon reached the Prefect's house at Troyes. The Prefect sent at once for the Director of the Jury, the commissary, and the Public Accuser; and the Senator told his story. A warrant was made out for Marthe's arrest, and she was apprehended while still in bed at the Durieu's. Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne, at liberty on bail, was likewise snatched from one of her few brief moments of slumber during the long agony of the trial, and detained at the prefecture to be examined. Orders came to the prison; the accused were not to be permitted to communicate with any one, — not even with their counsel. At ten o'clock, the assembled crowd was informed that the court would not sit till one that afternoon.

This change, with the news of the Senator's deliverance, the arrests of Marthe and Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne, and the isolation of the prisoners, struck dread into the inmost souls of the inmates of the Hôtel de Chargebœuf. It may be easily imagined, too, how the excitement spread among the reporters, and the people who came out of curiosity, till it travelled over the whole town, and even reached the working population. About ten o'clock, the Abbé Goujet came to see Monsieur and Madame d'Hauteserre, and to speak with the counsel; and they all breakfasted together, if people can be said

to breakfast in such circumstances. Afterwards the curé took M. de Granville and Bordin aside, told them what Marthe had said in confidence, and produced the scrap of the letter. The lawyers exchanged glances.

'There is no more to be said! It is all over with us, it seems. Let us at least put a good face upon it,' said Bordin.

The Director of the Jury and the Public Accuser combined were too much for Marthe. Proof against her, moreover, was abundant. Lechesneau had sent to search the cell, and the bottom crust of Marthe's last loaf had been found there, with several empty bottles and other things. During the long hours of captivity Malin had made conjecture on conjecture, and sought every least sign of motive on the part of his enemies. Naturally he communicated everything to the magistrate. Michu's farm-house had only recently been built, and as the oven was new the joints of the bricks in the floor had left a sort of pattern on the crust of the loaf. The bottles, besides, were sealed with green wax, similar, in all probability, to the wax on the bottles in Michu's cellar. These shrewd remarks produced the expected results; the examining magistrate made the identification in Marthe's presence. Lechesneau, the Public Accuser, and the commissary impressed her with the idea that nothing now save full confession could save her husband's life. Their seeming good-nature at a time when proof against her was so overwhelming drew the admission that no one knew of the hiding-place save Michu, the MM. de Simeuse and d'Hauteserre, and that she herself had carried provisions to the Senator three times during the night. Laurence was obliged to own that Michu had discovered the hole and showed it to her, as a refuge for the nobles from the police.

As soon as the precognitions were made, intimation was sent to the jury and counsel. At three o'clock the President began by announcing that there were new elements in the case. Michu was confronted with three wine-bottles,

and asked if he recognised his property; the prosecution at the same time pointing out that the wax on the empty bottles was precisely similar to that used to seal a full bottle of wine taken from the farm-house cellar by the magistrate in Marthe's presence. Michu declined to acknowledge them as his, but the fresh piece of circumstantial evidence told with the jury when the President informed them that the empty bottles had been found in the place where the Senator was confined. Each of the accused was examined separately as to the position of the hole in the ruins of the monastery, till, after all the witnesses had been called on either side, it was established that Michu had discovered the place, and that no one knew of it save Laurence and the four nobles. Judge, then, of the effect produced upon the jury when the Public Accuser announced that this very hiding-place had served as the Senator's prison.

Marthe was called as a witness. The keenest anxiety was felt by the accused and the audience when she appeared; and M. de Granville objected that a wife's testimony could not be taken against her husband. But the Public Accuser pointed out that Marthe, on her own confession, was an accessory after the fact, and that therefore she was neither sworn nor called as a witness; she was to be examined simply in the interest of truth.

'Besides,' added the President, 'we have only to read the report of her examination by the direction of the jury.' And the preliminary report drawn up that morning was accordingly read aloud by the clerk of assize.

'Do you confirm these admissions?' asked the President.

Michu looked full at his wife, and she, understanding her mistake, fainted away. It is no exaggeration to say that this news fell like a thunderbolt upon the accused and their counsel.

'I never wrote a line to my wife from prison,' asserted Michu, 'and I do not know a single one of the turnkeys.'

Bordin handed him the scrap of the letter; Michu had only to glance at it.

'Some one has imitated my handwriting,' he exclaimed.

'That is all that is left to you to say,' said the Public Accuser.

The Senator was now brought in with the due formalities. His appearance brought about a theatrical change of scene. At the President's bidding, Malin, or the Comte de Gondreville, as the judges called him, pitiless to the previous owners of his splendid home, looked long and earnestly at the accused. He stated that his captors were dressed exactly like the four gentlemen; but added that he was so much confused at the time that he could not positively state that the accused were guilty.

'What is more,' said he, 'I am convinced in my own mind that these gentlemen took no part in the matter. The hands that bandaged my eyes were rough and coarse. And so,' he continued, glancing at Michu, 'I should be more willing to believe that my sometime bailiff undertook that office; still, I beg the jury to weigh my deposition carefully. My suspicions are of the very slightest; I do not feel at all sure. And for this reason, the two men who seized and rode off with me, put me behind the man who bandaged my eyes, a red-haired man like Michu. And now, odd as my observation may be, I am bound to make it, for it tells in favour of the accused, and I beg him not to be offended by it. I was tied closely to the man's back, and, quickly as we rode, I noticed the odour of my captor, and it was not that peculiar to Michu. As for the woman who brought me provisions from time to time, I am certain that she was Marthe, Michu's wife. I knew her the first time I saw her, by the ring that Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne gave her; she had forgotten to take it off. The court and the jury will see the contradictions in these facts; I cannot explain them at all as yet.'

Malin's deposition was received with unanimous ap-

proval and a murmur of applause. Bordin asked leave to cross-examine so invaluable a witness.

'Has M. le Sénateur reason to suppose that his detention might be attributed to other causes than the supposed interests of the accused?'

'I am certain of it,' said the Senator, 'but what the motive can have been I do not know; for I can declare that during my twenty days of imprisonment I have not seen any one.'

'Then do you think that at the château de Gondreville, there could be any information, titles, deeds, or papers of any importance to the MM. de Simeuse?'

'I do not think so,' said Malin. 'And even if it were so, I believe the gentlemen incapable of taking them by violence. They had only to ask me for them.'

'Did not M. le Sénateur order papers to be burnt in the park?' M. de Granville asked abruptly.

Malin looked across at Grévin. It was a sudden, keen glance that did not escape Bordin. Then he denied that he had burnt any papers.

When the Public Accuser asked about the Senator's previous narrow escape in the park, and whether he (the Senator) had not been mistaken as to the position of Michu's rifle, Malin replied that Michu was on the watch in a tree. This caused a great sensation, for it confirmed Grévin's testimony. The Simeuses and d'Hauteserres sat unmoved and impassive while their enemy overwhelmed them with his generosity; to Laurence it was agony so intolerable that the Marquis de Chargebœuf again and again caught her arms to hold her back. The Comte de Gondreville withdrew with a bow to the accused. It was not returned, — a little thing that made the jury indignant.

'They are lost!' Bordin whispered in the Marquis's ear.

'Alas! lost through pride, now, as always,' returned the Marquis.

'Our task, gentlemen, has grown too easy,' said the Public Accuser, rising to address the jury.

He accounted for the bags of cement. They had been used to make the socket for the bolt that fastened the door of the cell in the manner described in the precognition made by Pigoult that morning. He showed, without difficulty, that no one, save the accused, knew of the existence of the hole. He brought up all the fictions of the defence, and pulverised the arguments with the new proofs obtained in this miraculous manner. In 1806, it was too soon after 1793 and the time of the 'Supreme Being,' to talk of the divine justice; he spared the jury any allusion to the interference of Heaven. Finally, he added that the authorities would keep watch for the persons unknown who had set the Senator at liberty, and sat down to await the verdict with confidence.

The jury, to a man, were fully persuaded that there was a mystery, but that mystery in their opinion had been made by the accused; the prisoners would not speak out because private interests of the highest importance were involved.

To M. de Granville it was evident that there were machinations of some kind. He seemed, when he rose, to be overwhelmed, and this was in fact the truth, but it was not so much the new evidence that staggered him, as the manifest conviction of the jury. His pleading, perhaps, even surpassed yesterday's effort, for the second address was certainly a piece of closer and more logical reasoning than the first. But the indifference of the jury damped him; he was wasting words, and he knew it. It was a painful and numbing position. He pointed out that the Senator's release, as if by magic, and very certainly without the aid of Marthe or any of the accused, confirmed his previous arguments. Yesterday, surely, the accused might have expected an acquittal; and, if, as the prosecution supposed, they were able to detain or to release the Senator, they would not have chosen to set him free till the

verdict was returned. He tried to show that enemies concealed in obscurity were the only possible authors of the outrage.

Strange to say, while M. de Granville's words troubled the professional consciences of the judges and the Public Accuser, the jury listened as a matter of form; and the public, usually so ready to believe in the innocence of the prisoner, was convinced that the accused was guilty. There is an atmosphere of ideas. In a court of law the judges and jury feel the influence of the ideas of the crowd, and vice versa. The state of other people's minds can be known or felt, and M. de Granville in his peroration rose to a sort of feverish exaltation due to his conviction that his clients were guiltless.

'In the name of the accused,' he cried, 'I pardon you in advance for a fatal mistake that nothing can explain. We are playthings in the hands of some unknown machiavellian power. Marthe Michu is the victim of a detestable fraud, as people will recognise when the misfortune is irreparable.'

Bordin, with the Senator's deposition as a weapon, asked for the acquittal of the four nobles.

The President summed up the more fairly because the jury had evidently made up their minds. He even, on the strength of the Senator's deposition, leaned somewhat to the side of the accused; a piece of clemency which could not injure the case for the prosecution. In accordance with the verdicts declared by the foreman of the jury at eleven o'clock that night, Michu was sentenced to death, the MM. Simeuse to twenty-four, and the two d'Hauteserres to ten years penal servitude. Gothard was acquitted. The whole court tried to see how the five prisoners would bear themselves at the supreme moment when they came in as free men to hear their verdict and sentence. The four nobles looked long at Laurence; she flung them back a martyr's fiery glance from tearless eyes.

'If we had been acquitted she would have cried,' the younger Simeuse said to his brother.

Never did accused confront an unjust sentence with quieter brows nor more dignified bearing than these five victims of a villainous plot.

'Our counsel has pardoned you,' said the Marquis de Simeuse, addressing the court.

Madame d'Hauteserre fell ill, and kept her bed; for three months she could not leave the Hôtel de Chargebœuf. M. d'Hauteserre went peaceably back to Cinq-Cygne; but he was old, he had none of the distractions of youth to prevent the sorrow of age from eating his heart away. His frequent fits of absence of mind told the curé that the poor father was always on the morrow of that fatal arrest. There was no need to try Michu's beautiful wife. Marthe died in prison three weeks after her husband was sentenced to death. Her son she recommended to Laurence, in whose arms she passed away.

As soon as the decision was known, the Gondreville Mystery passed out of people's minds; amid political events of the highest importance it was soon forgotten. Society, like the sea, finds its level, and falls back into its way again after an upheaval. All trace of a disaster is soon effaced by the fluctuation of moving interests.

Laurence would have given way in those days if it had not been for her firmness of character, and her conviction that her cousins were innocent. She surprised M. de Granville and Bordin by the apparent calmness with which noble natures face the worst. She nursed Madame d'Hauteserre, sitting up with her at night, and every day she spent two hours in the jail. She would marry one of her cousins, she said, when they went to the convicts' prison.

'The convicts' prison!' repeated Bordin. 'Why, Mademoiselle, there is but one thing to think of now; we must petition the Emperor to pardon them.'

'Pardon? and from a Bonaparte?' Laurence cried out in horror.

The worthy old *procureur's* spectacles took a leap from his nose, but he caught them, and took a look at this girl that had grown to be a woman all at once. Her character was fully revealed to him. He turned and caught the Marquis de Chargebœuf by the arm.

'My lord Marquis, let us hurry to Paris,' he said, 'and save them without her!'

The petitions sent up by the MM. de Simeuse and d'Hauteserre and by Michu stood first on the list for the new Court of Cassation. Happily the decision was delayed by the inaugural ceremonies.

Toward the end of the month of September, after three hearings of the pleadings, and of the attorney-general Merlin, who appeared in person, the appeal was dismissed. Meanwhile, the Imperial Court of Paris was instituted. M. de Granville received the appointment of deputy attorney-general; and as the department of the Aube came within the jurisdiction of that court, he found it impossible in his official position to take the necessary steps for the condemned prisoners. But he wearied out his patron Cambacérès. Bordin and M. de Chargebœuf went to his house in the Marais on the day after the decision of the Court of Cassation, and found him in the honeymoon, for he had married in the meantime. But in spite of these various changes, M. de Chargebœuf saw clearly, from the young barrister's distress, that he was true to his clients. There are lawyers, and these are the artists of their profession, who take a case for a mistress. But this does not often happen; the reader had better not count upon it.

So soon as M. de Granville's ex-clients were alone with him in his private room, he turned to the Marquis.

'I did not expect your visit,' he said; 'I have used up all my credit already. Do not try to save Michu; you

will only obtain pardon for the MM. de Simeuse. Somebody must suffer.'

'Good Lord!' cried Bordin, holding up the three appeals to mercy, 'how am I to take it upon myself to withhold your old client's demand? If I throw this paper on the fire, I might as well cut off his head.'

He held out Michu's signature. M. de Granville took it up and looked at it.

'We cannot withdraw it,' he said, 'but mind this: if you ask pardon for all, you will get nothing.'

'Have we time to consult Michu?' asked Bordin.

'Yes. The order for an execution is issued by the attorney-general's staff; we can give you a few days' delay. Men are murdered,' he added, with a touch of something like bitterness, 'but there are certain forms to be observed, especially at Paris.'

M. de Chargebœuf had already been to the Chief Justiciary, and recollections of what he had said gave great weight to M. de Granville's bitter words.

'Michu is not guilty,' continued M. de Granville; 'I know it, and I say so; but what can one man do by himself with every one against him? And recollect that I am bound now to be silent. It is my duty to raise the scaffold on which my client's head is to fall.'

M. de Chargebœuf knew enough of Laurence to feel sure that she would not consent to save her cousins at Michu's expense. So the Marquis tried one last expedient. He had asked for an audience of the Minister of Foreign Relations, to discover whether diplomacy in high quarters might not afford a way of escape. He went with Bordin, who knew the Minister and had been of service to him several times. They found Talleyrand absorbed in the contemplation of the fire, his feet stretched out before him, his head on his hand, and his elbow on the table. A newspaper lay on the floor. He had just been reading the decision of the Court of Cassation.

'Please sit down, M. le Marquis,' said the Minister. 'And you, Bordin' (indicating a place opposite him at the table), 'write ——'

'SIRE, — Four innocent gentlemen, declared guilty by the jury, have just been informed that their appeal is dismissed by your Majesty's Court of Cassation.

'Your Imperial Majesty can only extend mercy to them. The four gentlemen only ask this favour of your august clemency that they may find an occasion of turning their deaths to account in your Majesty's service, by fighting under your eyes, and declare themselves to be respectfully your Imperial and Royal Majesty's' etc. . . .

'Only princes can confer such obligations as this,' said the Marquis de Chargebœuf, taking the precious draft of the memorial from Bordin's hands, and vowing inwardly to obtain august support for it.

'The lives of your relatives hang on the fortune of war, M. le Marquis,' said the Minister. 'Try to time your interview with the Emperor after a victory, and they will be saved.'

Talleyrand took up the pen and wrote a confidential letter to the Emperor, and a dozen lines for Marshal Duroc. Then he rang the bell and asked his secretary for a diplomatic passport.

'What is your real opinion of this affair?' he asked, quietly turning to Bordin.

'Then do you not know, Monseigneur, who has entangled us so thoroughly?'

'I think I do, but I have my reasons for wishing to make sure,' returned the Prince. Then, turning to the Marquis de Chargebœuf, he added, 'Go to Troyes. Bring back the Comtesse de Cinq-Cygne with you here to-morrow at this time; but no one must know of her arrival. Go to Madame de Talleyrand's apartments; I will

prepare her for your visit. Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne shall be placed where she can see a man who will stand in front of me. If she recognises in him an agent who made the domiciliary visit at Cinq-Cygne, in the time of the conspiracy of MM. de Polignac and de Rivière, — then not a word! not a gesture! whatever I may say or he may answer. Lastly, you must not think of saving any one but the MM. de Simeuse and d'Hauteserre; do not try to hamper yourselves with your scapegrace of a game-keeper.'

'A hero, Monseigneur!' cried Bordin.

'What! enthusiasm! and in *you*, Bordin? The man must be something indeed! — Our sovereign lord, M. le Marquis, is prodigiously vain; he will dismiss me before long, to carry out his follies without contradiction. He is a great soldier that can control the laws of time and space; but he cannot change men's natures, and he would like to mould them to his uses. Now, do not forget that your relatives' pardon can only be obtained by one person, and that person is Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne.'

The Marquis went over to Troyes, alone, and told Laurence how things stood. Laurence obtained permission to see Michu, from the attorney-general. The Marquis went with her as far as the gate of the prison and waited for her outside. When she came out her eyes were full of tears.

'Poor fellow, he tried to kneel to beg me not to give him another thought, and forgot the irons on his feet,' she broke out. 'Oh! Marquis, I will plead his cause. Yes, I will kiss their Emperor's boot. And if I fail, Michu shall live forever in our family; I will see to that. Present the petition for mercy, to gain time; I must have his picture. . . . Let us go.'

Next day, when the Minister knew by a preconcerted signal that Laurence was at her post, he rang his bell, and the attendant received orders to introduce M. Corentin.

'You are a clever man, my dear fellow, and I wish to employ you,' said Talleyrand.

'My lord ——'

'Listen. In Fouché's service you will make money, but you will never gain honour nor a position; but if you continue to serve me as you did just now at Berlin, you will be respected.'

'You are very good, my lord ——'

'You showed genius in that last business, at Gondreville.'

'Of what do you speak, Monseigneur?' asked Corentin, neither over-indifferent nor too much surprised.

'Monsieur,' the Minister returned dryly, 'you will never be anything; you are afraid ——'

'Of what, Monseigneur?'

'Of death!' said the Minister, in those rich, deep, hollow tones of his. 'Good day, my dear fellow.'

'It is the man,' said the Marquis de Chargebœuf, coming into the room, 'but we have all but killed the Countess; she is speechless with anger.'

'Nobody else could play such a trick,' said the Minister. —'There is a chance, my lord Marquis,' continued he, 'that your plans may miscarry. Set out as if you intend to go by way of Strasbourg. I will have your passports made out in duplicate, and in the second, the route shall be left blank. Have doubles, change your direction adroitly, and, more important still, change your travelling carriage; leave your doubles to be stopped at Strasbourg in your stead, and travel by way of Switzerland and Bavaria to Prussia. Not a word to any one, and be careful. You have to do with the police; you do not know what the police is!'

Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne offered Robert Lefebvre a sum sufficient to induce him to come to Troyes to paint Michu's portrait; and M. de Granville undertook to give

the famous painter of the day all possible facilities. M. de Chargebœuf set out in the old *berlingot* with Laurence and a man-servant who could speak German. But Mademoiselle Goujet and Gothard had started ahead of them in an excellent calèche, and near Nancy the two parties met, and exchanged carriages. At Strasbourg, accordingly, the commissary of police refused his *visa* to the travellers' passport, pleading strict orders. And at that very moment, Laurence and the Marquis left France behind, showing their passports at Besançon.

Laurence crossed Switzerland in early October, without paying the slightest heed to the wonderful scenery through which she travelled. She lay back in the carriage in the torpor that creeps over the condemned man, when he knows that the hour is come. In such hours, all the world is shut out by an eddying mist, and every commonplace thing wears a strange, unfamiliar aspect. The thought, 'If I fail, they will die by their own hands in prison,' beat in upon her brain, as the blow of the headsman's club falls on the limbs of the victim broken on the wheel. She felt more and more exhausted; she lost all her energy in the suspense as the cruel, swift, decisive moment drew nearer, when she should be face to face with the man on whom the four lives depended. She had made up her mind to give way to languor in the interval, so as to save all her strength. These calculations of a strong nature manifest themselves in different ways. Some loftier souls find relief in unexpected gayety during the supreme hour of suspense. The Marquis could not understand Laurence's mood. Sometimes he feared that he might not bring her alive to an audience, solemn only for the suppliants, yet surely it assumed proportions beyond those of ordinary private life. For Laurence, the thought that she must humble herself to the man whom she scorned and hated, meant the death of all generous sentiments within her.

'The Laurence that lives on afterwards will be a dif-

ferent creature from this Laurence that is about to die,' she thought.

Still, it was very difficult for the travellers to shut their eyes to the great general movement which they felt so soon as they crossed the Prussian frontier. The Jena campaign had begun. Laurence and the Marquis saw the magnificent divisions of the French army passed in review, and deploying here as at the Tuileries. Seen through the pomp and splendour of war, — a splendour that can only be described in biblical language, — the man whose spirit moved those masses of men loomed like a giant in Laurence's imagination. Before long the word victory rang in her ears. The Imperial troops had gained two signal advantages. Prince Frederick Louis of Prussia had been killed at Saalfeld the day before the travellers reached it in their effort to overtake Napoleon's lightning speed.

At last, on the 13th of October, that day of evil augury, Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne's travelling carriage overtook the main body of the army, and drove along by a river through the middle of the camp. She saw nothing but confusion. They were sent from village to village, from division to division, until she grew alarmed to think that she and the old man with her were drifting hither and thither alone in an ocean of a hundred and fifty thousand men, facing a hundred and fifty thousand of the enemy. Tired of seeing the line of river over the hedge-row by the muddy road along the slope, which they were following, she asked the soldier what it was called.

'The Saale,' he answered, and he pointed out the great masses of the Prussian army on the other side.

Night came on. Laurence saw the watch-fires lighted, and the glitter of steel. The old Marquis with chivalrous courage mounted the box-seat beside the new servant, and himself drove the two strong horses purchased the day before. He knew that he should find neither horses nor postilions on a field of battle. The army wondered at the

audacious carriage, till a field gendarme brought it to a stand, and rode down upon the Marquis shouting: —

'Who are you? Where are you going? Whom do you want?'

'The Emperor,' replied the Marquis de Chargebœuf. 'I have an important despatch from the cabinet for Grand Marshal Duroc.'

'Very well. You cannot stop here,' said the man. But Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne and the Marquis were obliged to stop, and so much the more so because it was growing dark.

'Where are we?' Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne asked of two officers who came past, their uniforms hidden by plain greatcoats.

'You are in advance of the French advanced guard, Madame,' returned one of the officers. 'You cannot stay here, for if the enemy moves our batteries will begin to play; you will be between two fires.'

'Oh!' she said indifferently.

At the sound of that 'oh!' the other officer spoke.

'How comes this woman to be here?'

'We are waiting for a gendarme,' said Laurence; 'he has gone to announce our arrival to M. Duroc, who will use his influence to obtain an interview with the Emperor for us.'

'An interview with the Emperor!' . . . exclaimed the first officer. 'Can you think of it on the eve of a decisive engagement?'

'Ah! you are right,' she said. 'I should wait till the day after to-morrow. Victory will soften him.'

The two officers moved away twenty paces toward the horses that were standing quietly, waiting for them to mount; and the calèche was forthwith surrounded by an extremely brilliant array of marshals and officers, who respected the carriage precisely because it was standing there.

'Great heavens!' exclaimed the Marquis, 'I am afraid that we were speaking to the Emperor.'

'The Emperor?' repeated a colonel-general, 'why, there he is!'

Then Laurence saw him a few paces away, alone and in front of the others. The officer who exclaimed, 'How comes this woman to be here,' was the Emperor himself, in a green uniform covered by his famous greatcoat. He had mounted a richly caparisoned white horse, and now with a field-glass in his hand he was intently studying the Prussian army beyond the Saale. Laurence knew why the calèche was allowed to remain and why the Emperor's escort respected it. A sudden revulsion passed through her. The hour had come. But at that moment she heard the dull heavy sound of a moving battery and the tramp of masses of men advancing in quick time, and the guns were put in position on the plateau. The batteries seemed to have a language of their own; the caissons vibrated; the metal gleamed.

'Marshal Lannes and his whole corps to the front! Marshal Lefebvre and the Guard to occupy the summit!' said the other officer — Major General Berthier.

The Emperor dismounted. At the first sign, his favourite mameluke Roustan ran forward to hold the horse. Laurence was stupid with astonishment. She could not believe that all this could happen so simply.

'I shall spend the night here on the plateau,' said the Emperor.

As he spoke, Grand Marshal Duroc, whom the gendarme at last had managed to find, came up to the Marquis de Chargebœuf and asked the reason of his arrival. The Marquis replied that a letter from the Minister of Foreign Relations would explain how urgently necessary it was that he and Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne should obtain an audience of the Emperor.

'His Majesty is about to dine in his bivouac, no doubt,'

said Duroc, as he took the letter. 'I will see what it is all about and let you know if it can be done. — Corporal! go with this carriage and lead the way to the hut in the rear.'

M. de Chargebœuf followed the field gendarme and came to a stand before a miserable hut built of earth and wood. A few fruit-trees grew about the place, which was guarded by pickets of horse and foot.

Seen from the top of the hill the majesty of war might be said to shine out in all its grandeur, for the lines of both armies lay out below in the moonlight. An hour went by, amid continual coming and going of aides-de-camp, till Duroc came himself and made Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne and the Marquis enter the hut. The floor was of trampled earth like a barn floor. Dinner had just been removed from the table, at which Napoleon was sitting on a rough chair by a smoky fire of green wood. It was plain from his muddy boots that he had been riding about across country. He had taken off his famous greatcoat, and wore the well-known green uniform with the broad red ribbon, set off by white kerseymere breeches and a white waistcoat, a costume that set off his pale, stern Cæsar's face to advantage. His hand lay on a map unfolded over his knees. Berthier, in the brilliant costume of a Vice-Constable of the Empire, stood behind him, and Constant, his body-servant, was handing the Emperor his cup of coffee on a tray.

'What do you want?' he asked, with affected bluntness; and a glance like a shaft of light seemed to look Laurence through and through. 'So you are not afraid now to speak to me before the battle? . . . What is it about?'

'Sire,' she said, looking back as steadily at him, 'I am Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne.'

'Well?' returned the Emperor sharply, thinking that the glance meant defiance.

'Do you not understand? I am the Comtesse de Cinq-Cygne, and I ask for mercy,' she said, kneeling as she held

out the memorial drawn up by Talleyrand, with foot-notes by the Empress, Cambacérès, and Malin.

The Emperor graciously raised the kneeling girl, saying with a shrewd glance: —

'Will you be good now? Do you understand what the French Empire ought to be?'

'Ah! just at this moment I understand nothing but the Emperor,' she said, overcome by the debonair manner in which this controller of fate spoke the words that hinted at pardon.

'Are they innocent?' asked the Emperor.

'All of them,' she cried passionately.

'All? Ah! no. The gamekeeper is a dangerous character; he might kill my Senator without asking your leave ——'

'Sire!' she exclaimed, 'if you had a friend that had devoted himself to you, would you desert him? Would not you ——'

'You are a woman,' he interrupted, with a trace of banter in his voice.

'And you are a man of iron!' she cried, with an impassioned harshness that pleased him.

'The man has been condemned after a fair trial,' he continued.

'But he is not guilty.'

'Child! . . .' said the Emperor. He took Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne by the hand, and led her out upon the plateau. Then he spoke with that eloquence of his that could turn cowards into brave men.

'There!' he said, 'there are three hundred thousand men, — they, too, are guiltless. Well, and by this time to-morrow, thirty thousand men will have died, and died for their country. Perhaps among the Prussians yonder there is some great mechanician, some man with ideas in his head, some genius, to be mown down to-morrow. And we, too, on our side, shall surely lose great men that will die unrecognised. I myself, perhaps, may see my best

friend fall. — Shall I cry out against God? No. I shall be silent. — Bear this in mind, Mademoiselle, that a man is as much bound to die for the laws of his country, as to die here for glory,' he added, leading the way into the hut. — 'Now, go back to France,' he said, turning to the Marquis, 'my orders will follow you thither.'

Laurence believed that Michu's punishment was to be commuted, and, in a great outpouring of gratitude, she knelt and kissed the Emperor's hand.

'You are M. de Chargebœuf, are you not?' said the Emperor, confronting the Marquis.

'Yes, Sire.'

'Have you a family?'

'A large family.'

'Why should you not give me one of your grandsons? He should be one of my pages. . . .'

('Ah!' thought Laurence, 'the sub-lieutenant peeps out; he means to be paid for his pardon.')

The Marquis bowed for all reply; but luckily General Rapp came hurrying in at that very moment.

'Sire, the horse-guards and the Grand Duke of Berg's cavalry cannot come up to-morrow before noon.'

'It is of no consequence,' said Napoleon, addressing Berthier; 'for us, too, there are propitious moments, let us turn them to account.'

At a sign of dismissal, Laurence and the Marquis withdrew to the carriage. The corporal set them on their way, and escorted them to a village where they passed the night. Next day they travelled further and further from the field of battle, to the sound of eight hundred cannon that thundered incessantly for ten hours. The tidings of the wonderful victory of Jena overtook them by the way. A week later, they reached the suburbs of Troyes. An order from the Chief Justiciary, sent through the attorney-general attached to the Court of First Instance at Troyes, directed that the four gentlemen should be set at liberty on bail,

pending the decision of his Majesty, Emperor and King; but at the same time, a second order for Michu's execution was sent down by the head of the staff of counsel for the prosecution. The news had arrived that very morning. Laurence went forthwith to the prison. It was two o'clock. She had not changed her travelling dress. She gained permission to stay with Michu through the last sad ceremony called 'the toilet.' The Abbé Goujet, good man, had asked leave to go with Michu to the scaffold. Absolution had just been given, and Michu was lamenting that he must die without knowing what would become of his masters. So when Laurence came in, he gave a cry of joy.

'I can die now!' said he.

'They are pardoned; I do not know the conditions, but they are pardoned,' returned Laurence. 'And I left nothing untried to save you, my friend, in spite of their advice. I thought I had saved you, but the Emperor deceived me with his royal graciousness.'

'It was decreed above that the watch-dog should die on the same spot as his old master and mistress,' said Michu.

The last hour went by very quickly. When it was time to leave the prison Michu ventured only to raise Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne's hand to his lips; but she held up her face for the noble victim's solemn kiss.

Michu refused to ride in the cart.

'The innocent ought to go afoot,' he said.

Nor would he allow the Abbé Goujet to lend his arm; he walked with dignity and resolution to the scaffold. As he lay on the plank he spoke to the executioner, asking the man to turn back the collar of his coat, which covered his neck.

'My clothes belong to you,' he said; 'try to keep it clean.'

The four gentlemen had scarcely time to see Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne. An orderly came from the general in command of the division, bringing sub-lieutenants' com-

missions for them all in the same regiment of cavalry, together with orders to repair at once to the depot at Bayonne. There were heartrending farewells, for all of them had some foreboding of the future, and Laurence went back to her desolate château.

The twin brothers fell together under the Emperor's eyes at Somosierra, the one defending the other. Their last words were — 'Laurence, *Cy meurs!*'

Both had reached the rank of major. Robert d'Hauteserre fell as a colonel in the attack on the redoubt at Borodino, and his brother took his place.

After the battle of Dresden Adrien became a brigadier-general; but he was badly wounded, and came home to Cinq-Cygne to be nursed. And then it was that the Countess, a woman of two and thirty, married Adrien d'Hauteserre to save the last of the four nobles who had once been around her. She had only a blighted heart to give, but he took it, as those who love can take, doubting nothing, when they have not lost faith altogether.

The Restoration roused no enthusiasm in Laurence. For her the Bourbons came back too late. Yet she had no reason to complain; her husband became a peer of France, with the title of Marquis de Cinq-Cygne, he received the appointment of lieutenant-general in 1816, and was rewarded by the blue ribbon for conspicuous services then rendered to the cause.

Laurence brought up Michu's son as if he had been her own child. He was called to the bar in 1827; and after two years' practice, was nominated assistant judge in the tribunal at Alençon, and subsequently became attorney for the crown at the Arcis tribunal. Laurence had invested Michu's capital. She handed over *rentes* bringing in an income of twelve thousand livres to the young man when he came of age; and afterwards arranged

a marriage between him and a rich heiress — Mademoiselle Girel of Troyes.

In 1829, the Marquis de Cinq-Cygne died in Laurence's arms; his father, and mother, and children, who idolised him, were about him at the last. At the time of his death, no one had succeeded in penetrating the secret. How the Senator was kidnapped remained a mystery. Louis XVIII by no means refused to make reparation for the injury done by the affair, but on the subject of its causes he was dumb; and thenceforth the Marquise de Cinq-Cygne was persuaded that the King was implicated in the catastrophe.

CONCLUSION

The late Marquis de Cinq-Cygne had invested his own savings and those of his father and mother in the purchase of a splendid mansion in the Rue du Faubourg du Roule. The house formed a part of a considerable estate entailed for the maintenance of the title. This explained the economy practised by the Marquis and his relatives till it became a sordid parsimony which often grieved Laurence. So after the purchase was completed, the Marquise ceased to live entirely on her estates (where she hoarded money for her children), and spent the winters in town the more willingly because her daughter Berthe and her son Paul had reached an age when their education required the resources of Paris. Madame de Cinq-Cygne went very little into society. Her husband could not fail to know that she always carried regrets in her heart; but for her he showed the most ingenious delicacy, and died, having loved but the one woman in the world. To that noble, so long slighted heart, the generous daughter of the Cinq-Cygnes returned as much love as she received during the last years of their life together; and Adrien was completely happy after all.

Laurence lives now for the joys of family life. No woman in Paris is more loved and respected by her friends. To visit at her house is an honour. Gentle, indulgent, intelligent, and what is more, simple, she charms all finer and rarer natures, and attracts them to herself, in spite of the trace of sadness in her manner. Each of her friends seems to himself to protect a woman so really strong; and perhaps in that secret attitude of protector lies the

charm of her friendships. The evening of Laurence's life is fair and serene after her sad and troubled youth. People know what she has passed through. Nobody has ever asked a question about a portrait, painted by Robert Lefebvre, on her drawing-room wall, its principal sad ornament since the keeper's death on the scaffold. Laurence's face wears the look of a hardly attained maturity, as of fruit ripened in spite of difficulties. Something like religious courage crowns the brows that have emerged from many trials.

The Marquise de Cinq-Cygne's fortune, increased by the law of indemnity, amounts to two hundred thousand livres a year, without taking her husband's income into account. She had inherited the eleven hundred thousand francs left by the Simeuses. Thenceforward she spent a hundred thousand francs per annum, and saved the rest for Berthe's dowry.

Berthe is the living portrait of her mother, with none of her daring spirit; she is her mother over again, grown dainty, sprightly, 'more feminine,' as Laurence says with a sigh. The Marquise would not hear of a marriage for her daughter till Berthe was twenty years old. The savings of the family had been judiciously invested by old d'Hauteserre when the funds suddenly fell in 1830, so that by the time Berthe was twenty years old, in 1833, her portion amounted to eighty thousand francs a year.

About that time the Princesse de Cadignan, wishing to marry her son, the Duc de Maufrigneuse, had gained an intimate footing for him in the Marquise de Cinq-Cygne's house. For some months past Georges de Maufrigneuse had dined three times a week at the Hôtel Cinq-Cygne. He escorted the mother and daughter to the Italiens, he caracoled about their carriage in the Bois. It was plain to the Faubourg Saint Germain that Georges was in love with Berthe, but no one could find out whether Madame de Cinq-Cygne wished her daughter to be a duchess until such

time as she should be a princess, or whether it was the Princess who would fain secure so fine a fortune for her son. Was the celebrated Diane making advances to the country noblesse? Or were the provincial noblesse dismayed by Madame de Cadignan's celebrity, or frightened by her tastes and ruinous life?

The Princess had grown devout. In her anxiety to do nothing to injure her son's prospects, she immured herself in private life, and spent the summer in a villa at Geneva.

One evening, the Marquise d'Espard and de Marsay, president of the council, were both at the Princesse de Cadignan's. She saw her old lover that night for the last time, for he died during the following year. Others were there besides. Rastignac, under secretary of state to de Marsay, a couple of ambassadors, one or two celebrated orators still left in the House of Peers, the old Ducs de Lenoncourt and de Navarreins, the Comte de Vandenesse and his young wife, and d'Arthez formed a strangely assorted circle, though it would be easy enough to account for their presence. It was a question of obtaining a pass for the Prince de Cadignan, from the Prime Minister, and de Marsay, unwilling to take the responsibility of granting the permit, had come to tell the Princess that the matter was in good hands. An old political hand was to bring a solution of the difficulty in the course of the evening.

The Marquise and Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne were announced. Laurence, who never wavered in her principles, was not so much surprised as shocked to find the foremost representatives of the Legitimist cause in either house talking and laughing with the prime minister of a sovereign whom she always spoke of as 'Monseigneur le Duc d'Orléans.' De Marsay, like a failing lamp, shone brilliantly at the last; he was glad to forget political anxieties for a little while. The Marquise de Cinq-Cygne, however, tolerated de Marsay very much as the Austrian

court had just accepted M. de Saint-Aulaire — the man of the world made the minister passable; but when M. le Comte de Gondreville was announced she rose as though her chair had been heated red-hot.

'Good-bye, Madame,' she said stiffly, addressing the Princess; and went, taking Berthe with her, picking her way across the room so as to avoid any encounter with a man so fatal to her.

'You have perhaps broken off Georges' marriage,' the Princess murmured for de Marsay's benefit.

Malin, the lawyer's clerk from Arcis, the Representative of the People. The Thermidorean, the tribune, the state councillor, count and senator under the Emperor, the peer of France by a grant of Louis XVIII, and one of the new peers of July, now made an obsequious bow to the Princesse de Cadignan.

'You need tremble no longer, fair lady, lest we wage war against princes,' said he, taking a seat beside her.

Malin had enjoyed the esteem of Louis XVIII, for his long experience had been useful to that monarch. He had contributed not a little to Decaze's overthrow, and Villèle had received the full benefit of his counsels. As Charles X gave him a cool reception, however, he had thought fit to adopt Talleyrand's grudge. He was now in high favour with the twelfth government under which he had served and would probably one day dis-serve. His friendship with one of our most famous diplomatists — a friendship of thirty-six years' standing — had come to an end during the past fifteen months. It was during the course of this evening that he made an epigram at the expense of the great politician.

'Do you know why he is hostile to the Duc de Bordeaux? . . . The claimant is too young ——'

'You are giving singular counsel to young men,' remarked Rastignac.

De Marsay had grown very thoughtful since the Prin-

cess spoke. He took no part in the lively conversation, but sat quietly watching Gondreville. The old man always went to bed early, and de Marsay was evidently waiting for him to go. The rest of the party followed de Marsay's example; they had seen Madame de Cinq-Cygne leave the room and knew her reasons for so doing. Gondreville had not noticed the Marquise, nor did he understand the cause of the general reserve; but business and political life had taught him tact, and he was, besides, quick-witted. Thinking that he was in the way, the old man of seventy took his leave and walked slowly to the door.

De Marsay, standing by the hearth, watched him go with an expression that suggested grave thoughts.

'I did wrong, Madame, when I omitted to give you the name of any negotiator,' the Prime Minister said at last when the carriage had rolled away. 'But I will redeem my fault, and put it in your power to make your peace with the Cinq-Cygnes. These things happened more than thirty years ago. It is as old a story as the death of Henri Quatre; though in truth between ourselves, and in spite of the proverb, that story (like a good many more tragedies in history) is known to scarcely any one. I vow and declare, at any rate, that even if this affair did not concern the Marquise, it would be none the less interesting; for as a matter of fact it throws a light on a famous passage in our modern annals, — the passage of the Mont Saint Bernard. MM. les Ambassadeurs will see that in the matter of depth our latter-day politicians are very far removed from the Machiavellis who were raised on high above the region of storms by the popular upheaval of 1793. Some of these have latterly "found a port," as novelists say. You must have been tossed through the hurricanes of those times if you would be anything in France to-day.'

'But it seems to me,' smiled the Princess, 'that in that respect your state of things at present leaves nothing to be desired ——'

A little burst of polite laughter followed this speech; de Marsay could not help smiling. The ambassadors seemed to be listening eagerly. A sudden fit of coughing seized de Marsay, and the rest were silent.

'One night in June, 1800,' the Prime Minister began, 'just as the light of the candles grew faint in the dawn, two men in the salon of the Hôtel of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, grew tired of bouillotte (perhaps they had only been playing to amuse others), and withdrew to a boudoir. The Hôtel used to be in the Rue du Bac in those days. As for those two men (one of them is dead now, and the other has *one* foot in the grave), each was in his way as extraordinary as the other. Both had taken holy orders, and subsequently both married. One had been a simple Oratorian, the other had worn a mitre. The name of the first was Fouché, I do not tell you who the second was; but at that time they were both simple French citizens, and neither of them particularly simple.

'The rest of the party left in the salon saw them go, and looked up somewhat curiously. A third man followed. This personage thought himself much cleverer than the first pair; his name was Sieyès; and as you all know, before the Revolution he too belonged to the Church. The lame man was at that time Minister of Foreign Relations. Fouché was Minister of General Police; Sieyès had been consul and had abdicated.

'A phlegmatic, stern little man next left his place, remarking aloud (so I was told by some one who heard him) —"I have my fears of a triplet of priests." This was the Minister of War. Carnot's remark apparently caused no anxiety to the two consuls over their game at cards in the salon. Cambacérès and Lebrun were at the mercy of their ministers, and their ministers were infinitely cleverer men than they. The statesmen of that time are now nearly all of them dead, there is no occasion to spare them; they belong to the province of history, and the history made

that night was terrible. I tell you this, because I alone know about it; for Louis XVIII told poor Madame de Cinq-Cygne nothing, and the present Government has no interest in discovering the truth.

'The four politicians sat down. Before they had had time to say a word, the lame man shut the door. Some say he drew the bolt (there is no one like a well-bred man for thinking of these little things). The three priests' haggard, impassive faces looked as you have always seen them. Carnot's was the only high-coloured countenance among them. The soldier was the first to speak.

'"What is in question?"

'"France," the Prince might have said. (I admire the Prince as one of the most extraordinary men of our time.)

'"The Republic," Fouché certainly would have said.

'"Power," was probably Sieyès' reply.'

De Marsay's rendering of the three speakers was so admirably perfect in tones, expressions, and gestures, that his audience exchanged glances.

'The three priests understood one another uncommonly well,' he continued. 'Carnot probably looked at his colleagues and the ex-consul with dignity enough; but I think he must have felt nonplussed in his own mind.

'"Do you believe in a success?" Sieyès asked him.

'"Anything may be expected of Bonaparte," returned the Minister of War. "He crossed the Alps safely."

'"At the present moment," remarked the diplomatist, with measured slowness, "he is staking his all."

'"In short, let us speak out," said Fouché. "What are we going to do, if the First Consul is beaten? Is it possible to reconstitute an army? Are we to remain his humble servants?"

'"There is no Republic, now," suggested Sieyès; "he is Consul for ten years."

'"He has more power than Cromwell had, and he did not vote for the King's death," added the Bishop.

'"We have a master," said Fouché. "Shall we keep him in power if he loses the battle? Or shall we return to a purely Republican government?"

'"France can only hold out if she recovers the energy of the time of the Convention," Carnot remarked sententiously.

'"I am of Carnot's opinion," said Sieyès. "If Bonaparte is defeated, and comes back, there must be an end of him. He has had too much to say these seven months past."

'"He has the army," Carnot said thoughtfully.

'"We shall have the people!" cried Fouché.

'"You are prompt, sir!" remarked the *grand seigneur*, and at the sound of that deep, resonant voice the Oratorian shrank into himself.

'"Let us speak out," said a fifth person, a member of the old Convention, who now showed his face. "Let us speak out. If Bonaparte wins the day, we will bow before him. If he loses, we will bury him."

'"You were here, Malin," said the master of the house quite imperturbably; "you will be one of us." And he beckoned the new-comer to a seat. It was owing to this circumstance that a sufficiently obscure member of the Convention became what he is even at this moment, as we have just seen. Malin was discreet, and the two ministers stood by him; but he was both the pivot of the machinery and the soul of their machinations.

'"The man is not by any means defeated yet!" Carnot exclaimed in a tone of conviction, "and he has just outdone Hannibal."

'"In case of misfortune, *here* is the Directory," Sieyès returned, very acutely pointing out as he spoke that they were five in number.

'"And it is to the interest of each one of us to maintain the French Republic," added the Minister of Foreign Relations; "three of us have thrown the cassock to the dogs,

and the General voted for the King's death. As for you" (turning to Malin), "you own *émigres*' estates."

'"Our interests are all the same," Sieyès affirmed peremptorily, "and our interests are also the interests of the country."

'"A rare coincidence," smiled the diplomatist.

'"Action is imperative," added Fouché. "The battle is being fought and Melas's forces are superior. Genoa has surrendered, and Masséna has blundered into embarking for Antibes. So it is not certain that he can effect a junction, and Bonaparte in that case will be thrown on his own resources."

'"Who told you the news?" asked Carnot.

'"It is sure news," returned Fouché. "You shall have the despatches in time for the Bourse."

De Marsay stopped for a moment. 'They did not mince matters among themselves,' he remarked smiling.

'"Now, when the news of the disaster comes," Fouché went on, "it will be no time for organising the clubs, appealing to patriotism, and making changes in the Constitution. Our 18th of Brumaire ought to be ready by then."

'"Let us leave the Minister of Police to do it," suggested the diplomatist, "and we must beware of Lucien." (Lucien Bonaparte was at that time Minister of the Interior.)

'"I can hold him in," said Fouché.

'"Gentlemen!" exclaimed Sieyès, "our Directory shall not be at the mercy of anarchy and change. We will organise an oligarchy, a senate composed of life members, an elective assembly in our control. For we must profit by the mistakes of the past."

'"With that system I shall have a quiet life," said the Bishop.

'"Find a man that we can trust with the correspondence with Moreau; for the Army of Germany will be our one resource!" cried Carnot, deep in thought.

De Marsay paused. 'In truth, these men were right, gentlemen!' he said. 'They behaved like great men in the crisis; and I should have done as they did.

'"Gentlemen!" . . . exclaimed Sieyès in stern, solemn tones.

'Every one present understood perfectly well what was meant by that word "gentlemen." The same promise, the same loyalty, could be read in all their faces; a promise of absolute silence and complete solidarity in case Bonaparte should return in triumph.

'"We all of us know what we have to do," added Fouché.

'"Sieyès meanwhile had slipped the bolt noiselessly back. His priest's ear had served him well. Lucien came in.

'"Good news, gentlemen! A courier has brought Madame Bonaparte a few words from the First Consul. He has made a beginning with a victory at Montebello."

'The three ministers looked in each other's faces.

'"Was it a general engagement?" asked Carnot.

'"No, a battle. Lannes covered himself with glory. It was a bloody encounter. Lannes with ten thousand men was attacked by eighteen thousand, and saved by a division that came up to his support. Ott is in full flight. In fact, Melas's line of operations has been cut."

'"When did this take place?" asked Carnot.

'"On the 8th," Lucien replied.

'"And this is the 13th," returned the sagacious Minister. "Well, to all appearance the fate of France is staked on the fortune of war at this moment." (And as a matter of fact the battle of Marengo began at daybreak on the 14th of June.)

'"Four days of mortal suspense!" said Lucien.

'"Mortal?" the Minister of Foreign Relations repeated coolly with a questioning look.

'"Four days," said Fouché.

'An eye-witness assured me that the two consuls only heard the news when the six men returned to the salon. It was then four o'clock in the morning.

'Fouché was the first to go. His was a profound and extraordinary genius, working in the shadow, and little

known; yet he was an equal surely of a Philip II, a Tiberius, or a Borgia. He behaved after the Walcheren affair like a consummate tactician, a great statesman, and a far-sighted administrator. He was the one minister that Napoleon had; and you know that he alarmed Napoleon at the time of which I speak. Fouché, Masséna, and the Prince are the three greatest men, the three wisest heads, that I know in diplomacy, war, and government. If Napoleon had frankly associated them with his work there would be no Europe now but a vast French empire instead. Fouché only became estranged from Napoleon when he saw Sieyès and the Prince de Talleyrand set aside.

'This was what he did, working beneath the surface with infernal activity. In the space of three days, without showing his hand, he stirred up the ashes and organised that general agitation which hung over the whole of France and revived the Republican energy of 1793.

'As some light must be thrown on this dark corner of our story, I must tell you that all the Republican plots against the life of the victor of Marengo may be traced to this agitation. It was the work of a man who held all the threads of the dispersed party of the Mountain. The consciousness of the harm that he had done gave Fouché firmness sufficient to point out to Bonaparte that, contrary to the opinion of the latter, there were more Republicans than Royalists mixed up in these plots.

'Fouché understood men to admiration. He counted upon Sieyès because Sieyès's ambition had been disappointed; upon Talleyrand because the prince was a *grand seigneur;* upon Carnot, because he knew Carnot's profound honesty; but he had his fears of our man of to-night, and this was how he set about committing him. Malin was only Malin in those days, and Malin was in correspondence with Louis XVIII. The Minister of Police accordingly set Malin to draft the proclamations of the Revolutionary government, with its enactments and

decrees. Factious persons who took part in the 18th of Brumaire were declared outlaws. And more, far more than this, the unwilling accomplice was obliged to have the necessary quantity of placards printed, and to store them in packages in his own house. The printer was arrested as a conspirator (for a Revolutionary printer had been purposely chosen), and the police kept him for a couple of months before they set him at liberty. The man died in 1816 in the firm belief that there had been a conspiracy set afoot by the Mountain.

'One of the most curious pieces of acting on the part of Fouché's police was, beyond question, the scene after the arrival of the first courier with the news of the loss of the battle of Marengo. The first banker of the day had an agent at the seat of war. The battle went against Napoleon, as you may remember, until about seven o'clock in the evening. At noon the banker's agent considered that the French army was hopelessly lost, and hastened to despatch a courier. The Minister of Police had sent for bill-posters and criers; and a trusty adherent had arrived with a waggon-load of the printed bills, when the courier, sent off in the evening, using his utmost diligence, arrived with the news of a victory that sent France fairly frantic with joy.

'Heavy sums were lost on the Bourse. But the army of bill-posters and criers were bidden to wait till the placards extolling the victory and the First Consul could be printed, and they published these instead of the proclamation of outlawry and the political death of Bonaparte.

'Malin knew that the whole responsibility of the plot was sure to fall on his shoulders. He was so frightened that he carted the packages of printed matter down to Gondreville by night, and no doubt he buried the unlucky papers in the cellars of the château that he had bought here under the name of another man, — he nominated him as president of a Court Imperial, — a man

called — Marion; that was his name. Then Malin went back to Paris in time enough to congratulate the First Consul.

'Napoleon came hurrying back from Italy after the battle of Marengo, as you know, with startling haste; and for those who know the secret history of the time, it is certain that a message from Lucien was the cause of his prompt return. Lucien had an inkling of the attitude of the Mountain party; he had no idea of the quarter from which the wind blew, but he was afraid of a storm. He was incapable of suspecting the three ministers; the cause of the movement, he thought, was the hostile feeling aroused by his brother on the 18th of Brumaire, together with the firm belief that the check in Italy was irreparable, a belief largely shared at the time by the rest of the men of 1793. The cry, "Down with the tyrant!" shouted at St. Cloud was always ringing in Lucien's ears.

'The battle of Marengo detained Napoleon in the Lombard plain till the 25th of June. On the 2d of July he arrived in France. Just try to picture the faces of the five conspirators as they congratulated the First Consul at the Tuileries on his victory! In that very room Fouché told the tribune (for Malin had a turn as a tribune) to wait a while yet, and that all was not over. As a matter of fact, it seemed to Fouché and to M. de Talleyrand that the First Consul was not quite so much wedded to the Revolution as they themselves were; and so, for their greater safety, they buckled him thereunto by the affair of the Duc d'Enghien. You can trace the execution of that prince, by visible ramifications, back to the plot woven that night in the Hôtel of the Minister of Foreign Relations, at the time of the Marengo campaign. Certainly, at this day, it is plain to any one who has known well-informed persons, that Bonaparte was duped like a child by M. de Talleyrand and Fouché. Ambassadors from the House of Bourbon were making overtures to the First Consul at that time. Talley-

rand and Fouché wanted to make a final breach between them.'

'Talleyrand was playing a game of whist at Madame de Luynes's,' began one of de Marsay's audience. 'At three o'clock in the morning he drew out his watch and interrupted the game to ask his three companions, quite suddenly and without any preface, "whether the Prince de Condé had any child beside the Duc d'Enghien." So absurd a question in M. de Talleyrand's mouth caused the greatest astonishment. — "Why do you ask, when you know so well that he has none?" said they. — "To inform you that the House of Condé has come to an end at this moment." — M. de Talleyrand had been at the Hôtel de Luynes since the evening began; he knew, no doubt, that it was impossible that Bonaparte should grant a pardon.'

'But all this has nothing to do with Madame de Cinq-Cygne, that I can see,' said Rastignac to de Marsay.

'Ah! you were so young, my dear fellow, that I forgot the conclusion. You know that the Comte de Gondreville was kidnapped. The affair cost the lives of the two Simeuses, and of d'Hauteserre's elder brother; d'Hauteserre married Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne, and became first the Comte and afterwards the Marquis de Cinq-Cygne ——'

Several persons, however, had not heard the story; and at their request, de Marsay gave the history of the trial, saying that the five mysterious persons were tools sent down by the general police to destroy the very packages of printed matter which the Comte de Gondreville had himself come down to burn, when he believed that the Empire was an assured fact.

'I suspect,' said de Marsay, 'that Fouché made search at the same time for proofs of the correspondence between Gondreville and Louis XVIII. There had been an understanding between them all along, — even during the Terror. But in this deplorable business there was an animus on

the part of the principal agent. He is living yet. He is one of the great men that can fill subordinate positions; he has distinguished himself by astonishing feats. They will not find his like again. It seems that Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne treated him uncivilly when he went down to arrest the Simeuses. So, Madame, you have the secret of the affair. You can explain it to the Marquise de Cinq-Cygne, and assist her to understand why Louis XVIII kept silence about it.'

PARIS, *January*, 1841.

AN EPISODE OF THE TERROR

To Monsieur Guyonnet-Merville

Is it not a necessity to explain to a public curious to know everything, how I came to be sufficiently learned in the law to carry on the business of my little world? And in so doing, am I not bound to put on record the memory of the amiable and intelligent man who, meeting Scribe (another clerk-amateur) at a ball, said, 'Just give the office a turn; there is work for you there, I assure you'? But do you need this public testimony to feel assured of the affection of the writer?

De Balzac.

On the 22d of January, 1793, towards eight o'clock in the evening, an old lady came down the steep street that comes to an end opposite the Church of Saint Laurent in the Faubourg Saint Martin. It had snowed so heavily all day long that the lady's footsteps were scarcely audible; the streets were deserted, and a feeling of dread, not unnatural amid the silence, was further increased by the whole extent of the Terror beneath which France was groaning in those days; what was more, the old lady so far had met no one by the way. Her sight had long been failing, so that the few foot passengers dispersed like shadows in the distance over the wide thoroughfare through the faubourg, were quite invisible to her by the light of the lanterns.

She had passed the end of the Rue des Morts, when she fancied that she could hear the firm, heavy tread of a man

walking behind her. Then it seemed to her that she had heard that sound before, and dismayed by the idea of being followed, she tried to walk faster toward a brightly lit shop window, in the hope of verifying the suspicions which had taken hold of her mind.

So soon as she stood in the shaft of light that streamed out across the road, she turned her head suddenly, and caught sight of a human figure looming through the fog. The dim vision was enough for her. For one moment she reeled beneath an overpowering weight of dread, for she could not doubt any longer that the man had followed her the whole way from her own door; then the desire to escape from the spy gave her strength. Unable to think clearly, she walked twice as fast as before, as if it were possible to escape from a man who of course could move much faster; and for some minutes she fled on, till, reaching a pastry-cook's shop, she entered and sank rather than sat down upon a chair by the counter.

A young woman busy with embroidery looked up from her work at the rattling of the door-latch, and looked out through the square window-panes. She seemed to recognise the old-fashioned violet silk mantle, for she went at once to a drawer as if in search of something put aside for the newcomer. Not only did this movement and the expression of the woman's face show a very evident desire to be rid as soon as possible of an unwelcome visitor, but she even permitted herself an impatient exclamation when the drawer proved to be empty. Without looking at the lady, she hurried from her desk into the back shop and called to her husband, who appeared at once.

'Wherever have you put?——' she began mysteriously, glancing at the customer by way of finishing her question.

The pastry-cook could only see the old lady's head-dress, a huge black silk bonnet with knots of violet ribbon round it, but he looked at his wife as who should say, 'Did you

think I should leave such a thing as that lying about in your drawer?' and then vanished.

The old lady kept so still and silent that the shopkeeper's wife was surprised. She went back to her, and on a nearer view a sudden impulse of pity, blended perhaps with curiosity, got the better of her. The old lady's face was naturally pale; she looked as though she secretly practised austerities; but it was easy to see that she was paler than usual from recent agitation of some kind. Her head-dress was so arranged as almost to hide hair that was white, no doubt with age, for there was not a trace of powder on the collar of her dress. The extreme plainness of her dress lent an air of austerity to her face, and her features were proud and grave. The manners and habits of people of condition were so different from those of other classes in former times that a noble was easily known, and the shopkeeper's wife felt persuaded that her customer was a *ci-devant*, and that she had been about the Court.

'Madame?' she began with involuntary respect, forgetting that the title was proscribed.

But the old lady made no answer. She was staring fixedly at the shop window as though some dreadful thing had taken shape against the panes. The pastry-cook came back at that moment, and drew the lady from her musings, by holding out a little cardboard box wrapped in blue paper.

'What is the matter, citoyenne?' he asked.

'Nothing, nothing, my friends,' she answered, in a gentle voice. She looked up at the man as she spoke, as if to thank him by a glance; but she saw the red cap on his head, and a cry broke from her. 'Ah! *You* have betrayed me!' . . .

The man and his young wife replied by an indignant gesture, that brought the colour to the old lady's face; perhaps she felt relief, perhaps she blushed for her suspicions.

'Forgive me!' she said, with a childlike sweetness in her tones. Then, drawing a gold louis from her pocket, she held it out to the pastry-cook. 'That is the price agreed upon,' she added.

There is a kind of want that is felt instinctively by those who know want. The man and his wife looked at one another, then at the elderly woman before them, and read the same thoughts in each other's eyes. That bit of gold was so plainly the last. Her hands shook a little as she held it out, looking at it sadly but ungrudgingly, as one who knows the full extent of the sacrifice. Hunger and penury had carved lines as easy to read in her face as the traces of asceticism and fear. There were vestiges of by-gone splendour in her clothes. She was dressed in threadbare silk, a neat but well-worn mantle, and daintily mended lace, — in the rags of former grandeur, in short. The shopkeeper and his wife, drawn two ways by pity and self-interest, began by lulling their consciences with words.

'You seem very poorly, citoyenne ——'

'Perhaps Madame might like to take something,' the wife broke in.

'We have some very nice broth,' added the pastry-cook.

'And it is so cold,' continued his wife; 'perhaps you have caught a chill, Madame, on your way here. But you can rest and warm yourself a bit.'

'We are not so black as the devil!' cried the man.

The kindly intention in the words and tones of the charitable couple won the old lady's confidence. She said that a strange man had been following her, and she was afraid to go home alone.

'Is that all?' returned he of the red bonnet; 'wait for me, citoyenne.'

He handed the gold coin to his wife, and then went out to put on his National Guard's uniform, impelled, thereto, by the idea of making some adequate return for the money; an idea that sometimes slips into a tradesman's head when

he has been prodigiously overpaid for goods of no great value. He took up his cap, buckled on his sabre, and came out in full dress. But his wife had had time to reflect, and reflection, as not unfrequently happens, closed the hand that kindly intentions had opened. Feeling frightened and uneasy lest her husband might be drawn into something unpleasant, she tried to catch at the skirt of his coat, to hold him back, but he, good soul, obeying his charitable first thought, brought out his offer to see the lady home, before his wife could stop him.

'The man of whom the citoyenne is afraid is still prowling about the shop, it seems,' she said sharply.

'I am afraid so,' the lady said innocently.

'How if it is a spy? . . . a plot? . . . Don't go. And take the box away from her ——'

The words whispered in the pastry-cook's ear cooled his hot fit of courage down to zero.

'Oh! I will just go out and say a word or two. I will rid you of him soon enough,' he exclaimed, as he bounced out of the shop.

The old lady meanwhile, passive as a child and almost dazed, sat down on her chair again. But the honest pastry-cook came back directly. A countenance red enough to begin with, and further flushed by the bake-house fire, was suddenly blanched; such terror perturbed him that he reeled as he walked, and stared about him like a drunken man.

'Miserable aristocrat! Do you want to have our heads cut off?' he shouted furiously. 'You just take to your heels and never show yourself here again. Don't come to me for materials for your plots.'

He tried, as he spoke, to take away the little box which she had slipped into one of her pockets. But at the touch of a profane hand on her clothes, the stranger recovered youth and activity for a moment, preferring to face the dangers of the street with no protector save God, to the

loss of the thing that she had just paid for. She sprang to the door, flung it open, and disappeared, leaving the husband and wife dumfounded and quaking with fright.

Once outside in the street, she started away at a quick walk; but her strength soon failed her. She heard the sound of the snow crunching under a heavy step, and knew that the pitiless spy was on her track. She was obliged to stop. He stopped likewise. From sheer terror, or lack of intelligence, she did not dare to speak or to look at him. She went slowly on; the man slackened his pace and fell behind so that he could still keep her in sight. He might have been her very shadow.

Nine o'clock struck as the silent man and woman passed again by the Church of Saint Laurent. It is in the nature of things that calm must succeed to violent agitation, even in the weakest soul; for if feeling is infinite, our capacity to feel is limited. So, as the stranger lady met with no harm from her supposed persecutor, she tried to look upon him as an unknown friend anxious to protect her. She thought of all the circumstances in which the stranger had appeared, and put them together, as if to find some ground for this comforting theory, and felt inclined to credit him with good intentions rather than bad.

Forgetting the fright that he had given the pastry-cook, she walked on with a firmer step through the upper end of the Faubourg Saint Martin; and another half-hour's walk brought her to a house at the corner where the road to the Barrière de Pantin turns off from the main thoroughfare. Even at this day, the place is one of the least frequented parts of Paris. The north wind sweeps over the Buttes-Chaumont and Belleville, and whistles through the houses (the hovels rather), scattered over an almost uninhabited low-lying waste, where the fences are heaps of earth and bones. It was a desolate-looking place, a fitting refuge for despair and misery.

The sight of it appeared to make an impression upon

the relentless pursuer of a poor creature so daring as to walk alone at night through the silent streets. He stood in thought, and seemed by his attitude to hesitate. She could see him dimly now, under the street lamp that sent a faint, flickering light through the fog. Fear gave her eyes. She saw, or thought she saw, something sinister about the stranger's features. Her old terrors awoke; she took advantage of a kind of hesitation on his part, slipped through the shadows to the door of the solitary house, pressed a spring, and vanished swiftly as a phantom.

For awhile the stranger stood motionless, gazing up at the house. It was in some sort a type of the wretched dwellings in the suburb: a tumble-down hovel, built of rough stones, daubed over with a coat of yellowish stucco, and so riven with great cracks that there seemed to be danger lest the slightest puff of wind might blow it down. The roof, covered with brown moss-grown tiles, had given way in several places, and looked as though it might break down altogether under the weight of the snow. The frames of the three windows on each story were rotten with damp and warped by the sun; evidently the cold must find its way inside. The house standing thus quite by itself looked like some old tower that Time had forgotten to destroy. A faint light shone from the attic windows pierced at irregular distances in the roof; otherwise the whole building was in total darkness.

Meanwhile the old lady climbed not without difficulty up the rough, clumsily built staircase, with a rope by way of a hand-rail. At the door of the lodging in the attic she stopped and tapped mysteriously; an old man brought forward a chair for her. She dropped into it at once.

'Hide! hide!' she exclaimed, looking up at him. 'Seldom as we leave the house, everything that we do is known, and every step is watched——'

'What is it now?' asked another elderly woman, sitting by the fire.

'The man that has been prowling about the house yesterday and to-day, followed me to-night——'

At those words all three dwellers in the wretched den looked in each other's faces and did not try to dissimulate the profound dread that they felt. The old priest was the least overcome, probably because he ran the greatest danger. If a brave man is weighed down by great calamities or the yoke of persecution, he begins, as it were, by making the sacrifice of himself; and thereafter every day of his life becomes one more victory snatched from fate. But from the way in which the women looked at him it was easy to see that their intense anxiety was on his account.

'Why should our faith in God fail us, my sisters?' he said, in low but fervent tones. 'We sang His praises through the shrieks of murderers and their victims at the Carmelites. If it was His will that I should come alive out of that butchery, it was, no doubt, because I was reserved for some fate which I am bound to endure without murmuring. God will protect His own; He can do with them according to His will. It is for you, not for me that we must think.'

'No,' answered one of the women. 'What is our life compared with a priest's life?'

'Once outside the Abbaye de Chelles, I look upon myself as dead,' added the nun who had not left the house, while the Sister that had just returned, held out the little box to the priest.

'Here are the wafers . . . but I can hear some one coming up the stairs!'

At this, the three began to listen. The sound ceased.

'Do not be alarmed if somebody tries to come in,' said the priest. 'Somebody on whom we could depend was to make all necessary arrangements for crossing the frontier. He is to come for the letters that I have written to the Duc de Langeais and the Marquis de Beauséant, asking them to find some way of taking you out of this dreadful

country, and away from the death or the misery that waits for you here.'

'But are you not going to follow us?' the nuns cried under their breath, almost despairingly.

'My post is here where the sufferers are,' the priest said simply, and the women said no more, but looked at their guest in reverent admiration. He turned to the nun with the wafers.

'Sister Marthe,' he said, 'the messenger will say *Fiat Voluntas* in answer to the word *Hosanna*.'

'There is some one on the stairs!' cried the other nun, opening a hiding-place contrived in the roof.

This time it was easy to hear, amid the deepest silence, a sound echoing up the staircase: it was a man's tread on the steps covered with dried lumps of mud. With some difficulty the priest slipped into a kind of cupboard, and the nun flung some clothes over him.

'You can shut the door, Sister Agathe,' he said in a muffled voice.

He was scarcely hidden before three raps sounded on the door. The holy women looked into each other's eyes for counsel, and dared not say a single word.

They seemed both to be about sixty years of age. They had lived out of the world for forty years, and had grown so accustomed to the life of the convent that they could scarcely imagine any other. To them, as to plants kept in a hot-house, a change of air meant death. And so, when the grating was broken down one morning, they knew with a shudder that they were free. The effect produced by the Revolution upon their simple souls is easy to imagine; it produced a temporary imbecility not natural to them. They could not bring the ideas learned in the convent into harmony with life and its difficulties; they could not even understand their own position. They were like children whom others have always cared for, deserted by their maternal providence. And as a child cries, they betook

themselves to prayer. Now, in the presence of imminent danger, they were mute and passive, knowing no defence save Christian resignation.

The man at the door, taking silence for consent, presented himself, and the women shuddered. This was the prowler that had been making inquiries about them for some time past. But they looked at him with frightened curiosity, much as shy children stare silently at a stranger; and neither of them moved.

The new-comer was a tall, burly man. Nothing in his behaviour, bearing, or expression suggested malignity as, following the example set by the nuns, he stood motionless, while his eyes travelled round the room.

Two straw mats laid upon planks did duty as beds. On the one table, placed in the middle of the room, stood a brass candlestick, several plates, three knives, and a round loaf. A small fire burned in the grate. A few bits of wood in a heap in a corner bore further witness to the poverty of the recluses. You had only to look at the coating of paint on the walls to discover the bad condition of the roof, and the ceiling was a perfect network of brown stains made by rain-water. A relic, saved no doubt from the wreck of the Abbaye de Chelles, stood like an ornament on the chimney-piece. Three chairs, two boxes, and a rickety chest of drawers completed the list of the furniture, but a door beside the fireplace suggested an inner room beyond.

The brief inventory was soon made by the personage introduced into their midst under such terrible auspices. It was with a compassionate expression that he turned to the two women; he looked benevolently at them, and seemed, at least, as much embarrassed as they. But the strange silence did not last long, for presently the stranger began to understand. He saw how inexperienced, how helpless (mentally speaking), the two poor creatures were, and he tried to speak gently.

'I am far from coming as an enemy, citoyennes—' he began. Then he suddenly broke off and went on, 'Sisters, if anything should happen to you, believe me, I shall have no share in it. I have come to ask a favour of you.'

Still the women were silent.

'If I am annoying you—if—if I am intruding, speak freely, and I will go; but you must understand that I am entirely at your service; that if I can do anything for you, you need not fear to make use of me. I, and I only, perhaps, am above the law, since there is no King now.'

There was such a ring of sincerity in the words that Sister Agathe hastily pointed to a chair as if to bid their guest be seated. Sister Agathe came of the house of Langeais; her manner seemed to indicate that once she had been familiar with brilliant scenes, and had breathed the air of courts. The stranger seemed half pleased, half distressed when he understood her invitation; he waited to sit down until the women were seated.

'You are giving shelter to a reverend father who refused to take the oath, and escaped the massacres at the Carmelites by a miracle——'

'*Hosanna!*' Sister Agathe exclaimed eagerly, interrupting the stranger, while she watched him with curious eyes.

'That is not the name, I think,' he said.

'But, Monsieur,' Sister Marthe broke in quickly, 'we have no priest here, and——'

'In that case you should be more careful and on your guard,' he answered gently, stretching out his hand for a breviary that lay on the table. 'I do not think that you know Latin, and——'

He stopped; for, at the sight of the great emotion in the faces of the two poor nuns, he was afraid that he had gone too far. They were trembling, and the tears stood in their eyes.

'Do not fear,' he said frankly. 'I know your names

and the name of your guest. Three days ago I heard of your distress and devotion to the venerable Abbé de ——'

'Hush!' Sister Agathe cried, in the simplicity of her heart, as she laid her finger on her lips.

'You see, Sisters, that if I had conceived the horrible idea of betraying you, I could have given you up already, more than once ——'

At the words the priest came out of his hiding-place and stood in their midst.

'I cannot believe, Monsieur, that you can be one of our persecutors,' he said, addressing the stranger, 'and I trust you. What do you want with me?'

The priest's holy confidence, the nobleness expressed in every line in his face, would have disarmed a murderer. For a moment the mysterious stranger, who had brought an element of excitement into lives of misery and resignation, gazed at the little group; then he turned to the priest and said, as if making a confidence, 'Father, I came to beg you to celebrate a mass for the repose of the soul of — of — of an august personage whose body will never rest in consecrated earth ——'

Involuntarily the abbé shivered. As yet, neither of the Sisters understood of whom the stranger was speaking; they sat with their heads stretched out and faces turned toward the speaker, curiosity in their whole attitude. The priest, meanwhile, was scrutinising the stranger; there was no mistaking the anxiety in the man's face, the ardent entreaty in his eyes.

'Very well,' returned the abbé. 'Come back at midnight. I shall be ready to celebrate the only funeral service that it is in our power to offer in expiation of the crime of which you speak.'

A quiver ran through the stranger, but a sweet yet sober satisfaction seemed to prevail over a hidden anguish. He took his leave respectfully, and the three generous souls felt his unspoken gratitude.

Two hours later, he came back and tapped at the garret door. Mademoiselle de Beauséant showed the way into the second room in their humble lodging. Everything had been made ready. The Sisters had moved the old chest of drawers between the two chimneys, and covered its quaint outlines over with a splendid altar cloth of green watered silk.

The bare walls looked all the barer, because the one thing that hung there was the great ivory and ebony crucifix, which of necessity attracted the eyes. Four slender little altar candles, which the Sisters had contrived to fasten into their places with sealing-wax, gave a faint pale light, almost absorbed by the walls; the rest of the room lay well-nigh in the dark. But the dim brightness, concentrated upon the holy things, looked like a ray from Heaven shining down upon the unadorned shrine. The floor was reeking with damp. An icy wind swept in through the chinks here and there, in a roof that rose sharply on either side, after the fashion of attic roofs. Nothing could be less imposing; yet perhaps, too, nothing could be more solemn than this mournful ceremony. A silence so deep that they could have heard the faintest sound of a voice on the Route d'Allemagne, invested the night-piece with a kind of sombre majesty; while the grandeur of the service — all the grander for the strong contrast with the poor surroundings — produced a feeling of reverent awe.

The Sisters kneeling on either side the altar, regardless of the deadly chill from the wet brick floor, were engaged in prayer, while the priest, arrayed in pontifical vestments, brought out a golden chalice set with gems; doubtless one of the sacred vessels saved from the pillage of the Abbaye de Chelles. Beside a ciborium, the gift of royal munificence, the wine and water for the holy sacrifice of the mass, stood ready in two glasses such as could scarcely be found in the meanest tavern. For want of a missal, the priest had laid his breviary on the altar, and a common

earthenware plate was set for the washing of hands that were pure and undefiled with blood. It was all so infinitely great, yet so little, poverty-stricken yet noble, a mingling of sacred and profane.

The stranger came forward reverently to kneel between the two nuns. But the priest had tied crape round the chalice of the crucifix, having no other way of marking the mass as a funeral service; it was as if God himself had been in mourning. The man suddenly noticed this, and the sight appeared to call up some overwhelming memory, for great drops of sweat stood out on his broad forehead.

Then the four silent actors in the scene looked mysteriously at one another; and their souls in emulation seemed to stir and communicate the thoughts within them until all were melted into one feeling of awe and pity. It seemed to them that the royal martyr whose remains had been consumed with quicklime, had been called up by their yearning and now stood, a shadow in their midst, in all the majesty of a king. They were celebrating an anniversary service for the dead whose body lay elsewhere. Under the disjointed laths and tiles, four Christians were holding a funeral service without a coffin, and putting up prayers to God for the soul of a King of France. No devotion could be purer than this. It was a wonderful act of faith achieved without an afterthought. Surely in the sight of God it was like the cup of cold water which counterbalances the loftiest virtues. The prayers put up by two feeble nuns and a priest represented the whole Monarchy, and possibly at the same time, the Revolution found expression in the stranger, for the remorse in his face was so great that it was impossible not to think that he was fulfilling the vows of a boundless repentance.

When the priest came to the Latin words, *Introïbo ad altare Dei* a sudden divine inspiration flashed upon him; he looked at the three kneeling figures, the representatives of Christian France, and said instead, as though to blot out

the poverty of the garret, 'We are about to enter the Sanctuary of God!'

Those words, uttered with thrilling earnestness, struck reverent awe into the nuns and the stranger. Under the vaulted roof of St. Peter's at Rome, God would not have revealed Himself in greater majesty than here for the eyes of the Christians in that poor refuge; so true is it that all intermediaries between God and the soul of man are superfluous, and all the grandeur of God proceeds from Himself alone.

The stranger's fervour was sincere. One emotion blended the prayers of the four servants of God and the King in a single supplication. The holy words rang like the music of heaven through the silence. At one moment, tears gathered in the stranger's eyes. This was during the *Pater Noster;* for the priest added a petition in Latin, and his audience doubtless understood him when he said: '*Et remitte scelus regicidis sicut Ludovicus eis remisit semetipse*'—forgive the regicides as Louis himself forgave them.

The Sisters saw two great tears trace a channel down the stranger's manly cheeks and fall to the floor. Then the office for the dead was recited; the *Domine salvum fac regem* chanted in an undertone that went to the hearts of the faithful Royalists, for they thought how the child-King for whom they were praying was even then a captive in the hands of his enemies; and a shudder ran through the stranger, as he thought that a new crime might be committed, and that he could not choose but take his part in it.

The service came to an end. The priest made a sign to the Sisters, and they withdrew. As soon as he was left alone with the stranger, he went toward him with a grave, gentle face, and said, in fatherly tones:—

'My son, if your hands are stained with the blood of the royal martyr, confide in me. There is no sin that

may not be blotted out in the sight of God by penitence as sincere and touching as yours appears to be.'

At the first words, the man started with terror, in spite of himself. Then he recovered composure, and looked quietly at the astonished priest.

'Father,' he said, and the other could not miss the tremor in his voice, 'no one is more guiltless than I of the blood shed——'

'I am bound to believe you,' said the priest. He paused a moment, and again he scrutinised his penitent. But, persisting in the idea that the man before him was one of the members of the Convention, one of the timorous voters who betrayed an inviolable and anointed head to save their own, he began again gravely: —

'Remember, my son, that it is not enough to have taken no active part in the great crime; that fact does not absolve you. The men who might have defended the King and left their swords in their scabbards, will have a very heavy account to render to the King of Heaven — Ah! yes,' he added, with an eloquent shake of the head, 'heavy indeed! — for by doing nothing they became accomplices in the awful wickedness——'

'But do you think that an indirect participation will be punished?' the stranger asked with a bewildered look. 'There is the private soldier commanded to fall into line — is he actually responsible?'

The priest hesitated. The stranger was glad; he had put the Royalist precisian in a dilemma, between the dogma of passive obedience on the one hand (for the upholders of the Monarchy maintained that obedience was the first principle of military law), and the equally important dogma which turns respect for the person of a King into a matter of religion. In the priest's indecision he was eager to see a favourable solution of the doubts which seemed to torment him. To prevent too prolonged reflection on the part of the reverend Jansenist he added: —

'I should blush to offer remuneration of any kind for the funeral service which you have just performed for the repose of the King's soul and the relief of my conscience. The only possible return for something of inestimable value is an offering likewise beyond price. Will you deign, Monsieur, to take my gift of a holy relic? A day will perhaps come when you will understand its value.'

As he spoke the stranger held out a box; it was very small and exceedingly light. The priest took it mechanically, as it were, so astonished was he by the man's solemn words, the tones of his voice, and the reverence with which he held out the gift.

The two men went back together into the first room. The Sisters were waiting for them.

'This house that you are living in belongs to Mucius Scævola, the plasterer on the first floor,' he said. 'He is well known in the Section for his patriotism, but in reality he is an adherent of the Bourbons. He used to be a huntsman in the service of his Highness the Prince de Conti, and he owes everything to him. So long as you stay in the house, you are safer here than anywhere else in France. Do not go out. Pious souls will minister to your necessities, and you can wait in safety for better times. Next year, on the 21st of January,'—he could not hide an involuntary shudder as he spoke,—'next year, if you are still in this dreary refuge, I will come back again to celebrate the expiatory mass with you——'

He broke off, bowed to the three, who answered not a word, gave a last look at the garret with its signs of poverty, and vanished.

Such an adventure possessed all the interest of a romance in the lives of the innocent nuns. So, as soon as the venerable abbé told them the story of the mysterious gift, it was placed upon the table, and by the feeble light of the tallow dip an indescribable curiosity appeared in the three anxious faces. Mademoiselle de Langeais opened the box,

and found a very fine lawn handkerchief, soiled with sweat; darker stains appeared as they unfolded it.

'That is blood!' exclaimed the priest.

'It is marked with a royal crown!' cried Sister Agathe.

The women, aghast, allowed the precious relic to fall. For their simple souls the mystery that hung about the stranger grew inexplicable; as for the priest, from that day forth he did not even try to understand it.

Before very long the prisoners knew that, in spite of the Terror, some powerful hand was extended over them. It began when they received firewood and provisions; and next the Sisters knew that a woman had lent counsel to their protector, for linen was sent to them, and clothes in which they could leave the house without causing remark upon the aristocrat's dress that they had been forced to wear. After awhile Mucius Scævola gave them two civic cards; and often and often tidings necessary for the priest's safety came to them in roundabout ways. Warnings and advice reached them so opportunely that they could only have been sent by some person in the possession of state secrets. And, at a time when famine threatened Paris, invisible hands brought rations of 'white bread' for the proscribed women in the wretched garret. Still they fancied that Citizen Mucius Scævola was only the mysterious instrument of a kindness always ingenious, and no less intelligent.

The noble ladies in the garret could no longer doubt that their protector was the stranger of the expiatory mass on the night of the 22d of January, 1793; and a kind of cult of him sprang up among them. Their one hope was in him; they lived through him. They added special petitions for him to their prayers; night and morning the pious souls prayed for his happiness, his prosperity, his safety; entreating God to remove all snares far from his path, to deliver

him from his enemies, to grant him a long and peaceful life. And with this daily renewed gratitude, as it may be called, there blended a feeling of curiosity which grew more lively day by day. They talked over the circumstances of his first sudden appearance, their conjectures were endless; the stranger had conferred one more benefit upon them by diverting their minds. Again, and again, they said, when he next came to see them as he promised, to celebrate the sad anniversary of the death of Louis XVI, he should not escape their friendship.

The night so impatiently awaited came at last. At midnight the old wooden staircase echoed with the stranger's heavy footsteps. They had made the best of their room for his coming; the altar was ready, and this time the door stood open, and the two Sisters were out at the stairhead, eager to light the way. Mademoiselle de Langeais even came down a few steps, to meet their benefactor the sooner.

'Come,' she said, with a quaver in the affectionate tones, 'come in; we are expecting you.'

He raised his face, gave her a dark look, and made no answer. The Sister felt as if an icy mantle had fallen over her, and said no more. At the sight of him, the glow of gratitude and curiosity died away in their hearts. Perhaps he was not so cold, not so taciturn, not so stern as he seemed to them, for in their highly wrought mood they were ready to pour out their feeling of friendship. But the three poor prisoners understood that he wished to be a stranger to them; and submitted. The priest fancied that he saw a smile on the man's lips as he saw their preparations for his visit, but it was at once repressed. He heard mass, said his prayer, and then disappeared, declining, with a few polite words, Mademoiselle de Langeais's invitation to partake of the little collation made ready for him.

After the 9th Thermidor, the sisters and the Abbé de

Marolles could go about Paris without the least danger. The first time that the abbé went out he walked to a perfumer's shop at the sign of *The Queen of Roses*, kept by the Citizen Ragon and his wife, court perfumers. The Ragons had been faithful adherents of the Royalist cause; it was through their means that the Vendéen leaders kept up a correspondence with the Princes and the Royalist Committee in Paris. The abbé, in the ordinary dress of the time, was standing on the threshold of the shop — which stood between Saint Roch and the Rue des Frondeurs — when he saw that the Rue Saint Honoré was filled with a crowd and he could not go out.

'What is the matter?' he asked Madame Ragon.

'Nothing,' she said; 'it is only the tumbril cart and the executioner going to the Place Louis XV. Ah! we used to see it often enough last year; but to-day, four days after the anniversary of the twenty-first of January, one does not feel sorry to see the ghastly procession.'

'Why not?' asked the abbé. 'That is not said like a Christian.'

'Eh! but it is the execution of Robespierre's accomplices. They defended themselves as long as they could, but now it is their turn to go where they sent so many innocent people.'

The crowd poured by like a flood. The abbé, yielding to an impulse of curiosity, looked up above the heads, and there in the tumbril stood the man who had heard mass in the garret three days ago.

'Who is it?' he asked; 'who is the man with ——'

'That is the headsman,' answered M. Ragon, calling the executioner — the *exécuteur des hautes œuvres* — by the name he had borne under the Monarchy.

'Oh! my dear, my dear! M. l'Abbé is dying!' cried out old Madame Ragon. She caught up a flask of vinegar, and tried to restore the old priest to consciousness.

'He must have given me the handkerchief that the

King used to wipe his brow on the way to his martyrdom,' murmured he. '. . . Poor man! . . . There was a heart in the steel blade, when none was found in all France. . . .'

The perfumers thought that the poor abbé was raving.

PARIS, *January*, 1831.

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